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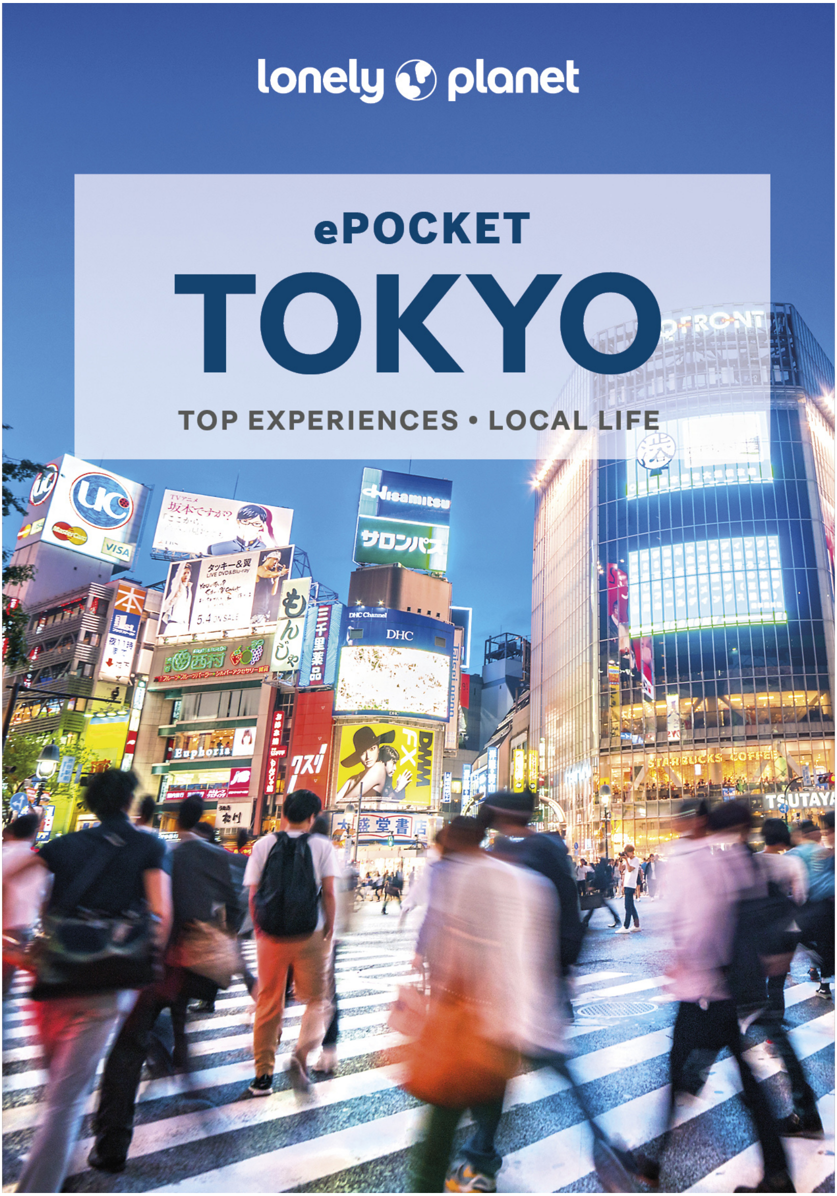
TOKYO

TOP EXPERIENCES • LOCAL LIFE



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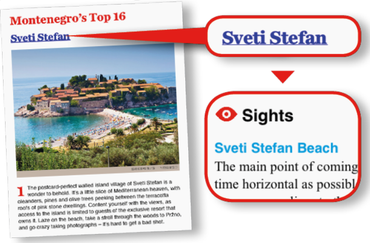

Montenegro's Top 16

Sveti Stefan

1 The postcard-perfect walled island village of Sveti Stefan is a wonder to behold. It's a little slice of Mediterranean heaven, with oleanders, pines and olive trees peeking between the terracotta roofs of pink stone dwellings. Content yourself with the views, as access to the island is limited to guests of the exclusive resort that owns it. Laze on the beach, take a stroll through the woods to Pržno, and go crazy taking photographs – it's hard to get a bad shot.

Sveti Stefan

Sights

Sveti Stefan Beach

The main point of coming time horizontal as possibl

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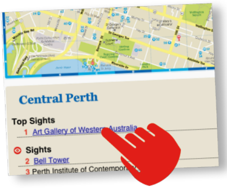

Central Perth

Top Sights

1 Art Gallery of Western Australia

Sights

2 Bell Tower

3 Perth Institute of Contempor

Map links to reviews mean you can find info quickly.

Double tap then pinch and zoom

Central Perth
59
35
29
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Perth
Art Gallery of Western Australia
Pier St

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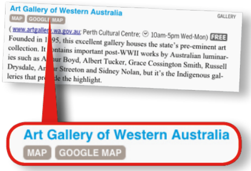

Art Gallery of Western Australia

MAP GOOGLE MAP GALLERY

(www.artgaller .wa.gov.au; Perth Cultural Centre; 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) FREE Founded in 1 95, this excellent gallery houses the state's pre-eminent art collection. It ontains important post-WWII works by Australian luminaries such as A hur Boyd, Albert Tucker, Grace Cossington Smith, Russell Drysdale, Ar ur Streeton and Sidney Nolan, but it's the Indigenous galleries that pr de the highlight.

Art Gallery of Western Australia

MAP GOOGLE MAP

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To get the most out of the maps in this guide, use the zoom function on your device, or visit http://media.lonelyplanet.com/ebookmaps to grab a PDF of the maps.

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Welcome to Tokyo

More than any one sight, it’s the city itself that enchants visitors. It’s a sprawling, organic thing, stretching as far as the eye can see (yet surprisingly easy to navigate). In Tokyo you can experience the best Japan has to offer: from classic sights like shrines and temples to cutting-edge art and architecture – as well as superlative dining around every corner.

Asakusa at dusk | F11PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Tokyo's Top Experiences

◉ Get the Japanese temple experience at Sensō-ji

MANUEL ASCANIO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Tokyo’s Top Experiences

Join the crowds at Shibuya Crossing

JONATHAN STOKES/LONELY PLANET ©

Leave the city behind at Meiji-jingū

BULE SKY STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Tokyo's Top Experiences

Visit Tsukiji Market

F11PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Tokyo’s Top Experiences

Stroll the grounds of the Imperial Palace

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Enjoy a night out in Golden Gai

Orange
王子
BAR
Baltimore
Coca-Cola
5GALLONS
カメラを止めるな!

JON ARNOLD IMAGES LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

Admire Japanese art at the Tokyo National Museum

SIRA ANAMWONG/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Tokyo’s Top Experiences

◉Take a journey through Koishikawa Kōrakuen

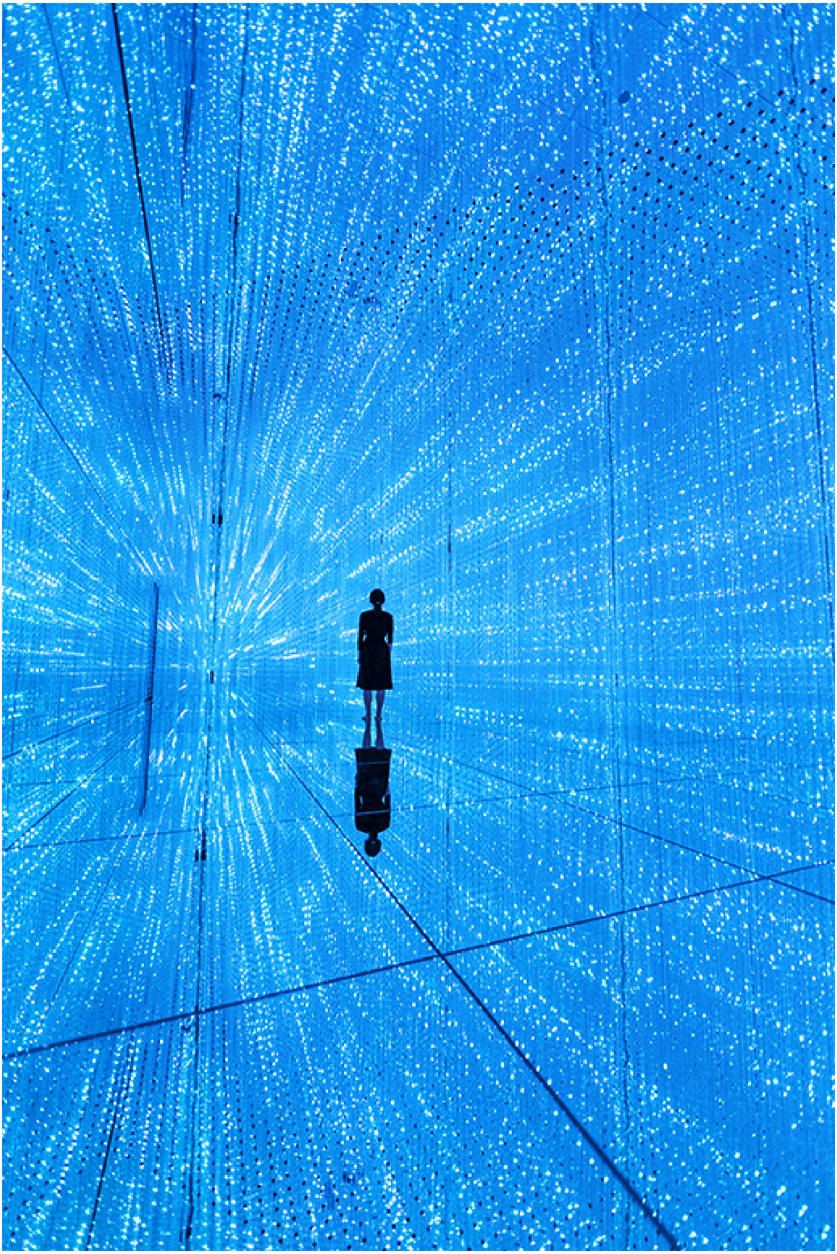
PHOTONN/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Be enchanted by Ghibli Museum, Mitaka

三鷹の森
ジブリ美術館
GHIBLI MUSEUM, MITAKA

PIO3/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Enter a world of art at teamLab Planets



TEAMLAB, THE INFINITE CRYSTAL UNIVERSE © TEAMLAB

Tokyo’s Top Experiences

See kabuki at Kabukiza

UGIS RIBA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Catch the big boys in action at Ryōgoku Kokugikan

J. HENNING BUCHHOLZ/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Dining Out

As visitors to Tokyo quickly discover, the people here are absolutely obsessed with food. The city has a vibrant and cosmopolitan dining scene and a strong culture of eating out – popular restaurants are packed most nights of the week. Best of all, you can get superlative meals on any budget.

CLEMENT CAZOTTES/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

Tokyo's Dining Scene

Tokyo foodies take pride in what they like to think of as their 'boutique' dining scene. Rather than offering long menus of elaborate dishes, many of the best restaurants make only a few things – and sometimes even just one! Sushi shops make sushi; tempura shops make tempura. A restaurant that does too much might be suspect: how can it compare to a speciality shop that has been honing its craft for generations?

Izakaya

A visit to an *izakaya* (居酒屋) – which means ‘drinking house’, but is kind of like a Japanese version of a pub – is a classic Tokyo experience. It’s dinner and drinks in one: food is ordered a few dishes at a time along with rounds of alcohol (usually sake or beer); it’s fine to order a soft drink (but a drink order is required). Some serve only the classics, dishes like *sashimi moriawase* (a selection of sashimi) and *shio-yaki-zakana* (a whole fish grilled with salt); others serve less traditional fare like *karaage* (fried chicken) or *poteto sarada* (potato salad). While the vibe is lively and social, it’s perfectly acceptable to go by yourself and sit at the counter.

Reservations

It’s become easier to make reservations online in English, which we recommend for restaurants that you’ve got your heart set on visiting. Just ensure you don’t flake – it’s a major etiquette no-no (see).

Best for Classic Japanese

Kikunoi Tokyo branch of legendary Kyoto *kaiseki* (haute-cuisine) restaurant.

Kozue Seasonal dishes, stunning presentation and night views over Shinjuku.

Inshōtei Affordable *kaiseki*-inspired meals in an elegant wooden building. (pictured)

Best Izakaya

Shinsuke Century-old local institution adored by sake aficionados.

Kanae The upmarket *izakaya* experience.

Donjaca Vintage mid-20th-century vibe and home-style food.

Best Sushi

Kyūbey Rarefied Ginza sushi at its finest.

Yoshino-zushi Honten Classic neighbourhood sushi counter, with some serious pedigree.

Nemuro Hanamaru One of the city's best *kaiten-zushi* (conveyor-belt sushi restaurants).

Best Sweets

Umezono Historic destination for classic Japanese-style desserts.

Tsuruya Yoshinobu A rare chance to see *wagashi* (traditional sweets) being made.

Ouca All the Japanese ice-cream flavours – not just *matcha.*

Best Noodles

Kanda Yabu Soba Specialising in soba since 1880.

Ginza Sato Yosuke Silky thin *inaniwa* udon, a speciality of Akita.

Maruka Cult fave for chunky Kagawa-style udon.

Best on a Budget

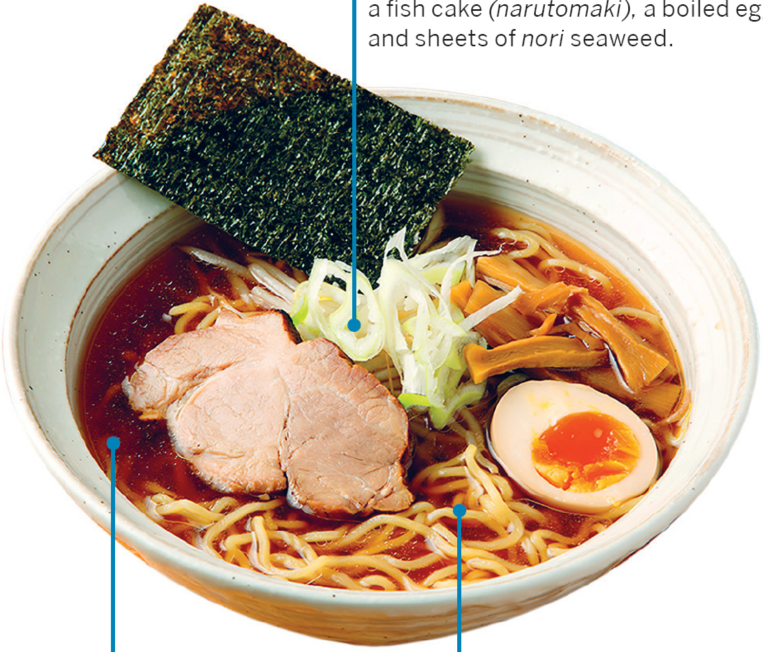
Delifucious Fish burgers from a former sushi chef.

Maisen Long-running staple for *tonkatsu,* in a former bathhouse.

Harajuku Gyōza-rō Everyone's favourite local *gyōza* shop

Tokyo in a Bowl

Ramen



Toppings – typical toppings include slices of roast pork (*chāshū*), bean sprouts, spring onions, thin slices of a fish cake *(narutomaki),* a boiled egg and sheets of *nori* seaweed.

Broth – the stock is usually made from pork or chicken bones (but sometimes fish bones) and can be flavoured with vegetables, soy sauce or miso.

Noodles – ramen noodles are made from wheat flour mixed with egg and usually *kansui,* an alkaline solution.

SASAKEN/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Top Places for Ramen

Kagari Honten The standard-bearer for *tori paitan* – broth with a *tonkotsu*-like creaminess but accomplished with chicken bones, rather than pork bones.

Jikasei Mensho The newest shop from the latest upstart in the Tokyo ramen scene has some actually good vegan ramen.

Nagi Its *niboshi*-based soup based on sardines brought a funky, smoky deliciousness to the ramen game.

Afuri Known for a light broth spiked with *yuzu* (a kind of Japanese citrus), which proves that thick and creamy is not always better.

Tokyo Ramen Street Branches of eight top shops from around Japan – from Kyūshū to Hokkaidō – in the basement of Tokyo station.

Ramen in Tokyo

Tokyo has a passion for ramen: the noodles are the subject of profuse blogs and a reason to stand in line for over an hour. Grabbing late-night ramen after a rousing round of karaoke is a top Tokyo experience.

By conservative estimates there are over 3000 ramen shops in the capital. Neighbourhoods like Shinjuku, Ikebukuro, Kanda and Akihabara in particular are known as ‘ramen battlegrounds’ – where competition (and creativity) is fierce.

壱角家
横浜家系ラーメン
ラーメンセット
塩ラーメンセット
油そばセット
24h営業
テーブル席ございます
横浜家系ラーメン
ゆったりとしたテーブル席ございます
超!!!!!级推荐
濃厚でヒヨいラーメン
B1

Ramen shop, Shinjuku | SEAN K/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Bar Open

Make like Lady Gaga in a karaoke box; see the city from a sky-high bar, cocktail in hand; stumble upon a scene stashed away in an anonymous building; or lose track of time in one of the city's storied, late-night dives: that's nightlife, Tokyo-style. There are also indie coffee shops and, increasingly, cool contemporary teahouses.

MARK BASSETT/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

Where to Drink

Shinjuku, Shibuya and Roppongi are the biggest nightlife districts; this is where you'll find the highest concentration of bars and nightclubs. Ebisu, meanwhile, has a low-key trendy scene. But there are bars – and karaoke parlours – everywhere: this is a work-hard, play-hard city and you'll find people out any night of the week.

What to Drink

Nihonshū (sake) is considered the national beverage; it's made from fermented rice. There is a huge variety of styles and flavours; if you've discounted sake in your home country, give it another go here. Sake is typically drunk with food at an *izakaya*, but more boutique sake bars are popping up – and most shops have tasting counters.

Another beverage to try is *shōchū,* a distilled spirit made from potato, barley or sugar cane. It's quite strong, and is often mixed in cocktails. Beer – *nama* means draught beer in Japanese – and whisky are also popular. Good Japanese whiskies are increasingly hard to find; Zoetrope has the best selection.

Need to Know

Bars often charge a cover fee (around ¥300 to ¥1000); this may not be clearly stated, but if you are served some kind of snack expect an extra charge (consider it in lieu of a tip). Hotel bars just add a 10% to 15% service charge to the bill. Club entry can be steep (¥3000 to ¥4000 on a Friday or Saturday); you'll need ID to enter.

Best Drinks with a View

New York Bar The definitive high-altitude Tokyo night spot. (pictured)

Mandarin Bar Delish cocktails, posh surrounds and views over central Tokyo.

Two Rooms A fashionable crowd and sofas on a terrace overlooking Harajuku.

Best for Tea

Sakurai Japanese Tea Experience A contemporary take on the tea ceremony.

Ippuku & Matcha Matcha lattes to go – or book the private teahouse experience.

Best for Sake

Gem by Moto Your gateway to the world of artisan *nihonshū*.

Another 8 Small-batch sake in a renovated garage.

Best for Cocktails

Bar BenFiddich Where mixology means grinding your own spices and growing your own herbs.

SG Club Globally inspired flavours, precise execution and speakeasy vibes.

Gen Yamamoto Cocktails prepared like haute cuisine.

Best for Craft Beers

Mikkeller Tokyo For when ‘ordinary’ craft beer just won’t cut it anymore.

Hitachino Brewing Lab Brewed on location in Akihabara with riverside seating.

Best for Coffee

Glitch Coffee & Roasters The best pour-over in town, with a truly spectacular selection of single-origin beans roasted in-house.

Cafe de l’Ambre One of Tokyo’s longest-running cafes, and a local institution.

Treasure Hunt

Since the Edo era, when courtesans set the day's fashions, Tokyoites have lusted after both the novel and the outstanding. The city remains the trendsetter for the nation, and its residents shop – economy be damned – with an infectious enthusiasm. Join them in the hunt for the cutest fashions, the latest gadgets or the perfect teacup.

MIKECRANEPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

Where to Shop

Ginza has long been Tokyo's premier shopping district and has many high-end department stores and boutiques, but also fast-fashion emporiums. Nihom-bashi is the go-to spot for gourmet goods.

Harajuku, on the other side of town, has boutiques that deal in both luxury fashion and street cred. Shibuya, meanwhile, is the locus of the teen-fashion trend machine. Other west-side neighbourhoods Ebisu, Daikanyama and Naka-Meguro have their own fashion cachet, though seeking out the best spots requires a little legwork.

For one-stop shopping, Shinjuku is ideal: here there are department stores, electronics outfitters, bookshops and more. Asakusa (pictured) has many stores selling artisan crafts, both traditional and contemporary, which makes it a good place for souvenir-hunting. Akihabara is the place to search out manga, anime and gamer merch, and is also known for its electronics shops.

Duty Free & Sales

Department stores, chain stores and, increasingly, boutiques offer duty-free shopping. Look for stickers in windows that say 'tax-free shop'. To qualify, you must show your passport and spend more than ¥5000 in any one shop. Otherwise, sales tax is 10%. Major sales happen, sadly, just twice a year in Japan: at the beginning of January (after the New Year's holiday) and again at the beginning of July.

Best for Fashion

Shibuya Parco Tokyo's most fashion-forward department store.

Okura One-of-a-kind indigo-dyed clothing and accessories.

Kapital Denim woven on vintage looms and lush, hand-dyed textiles.

Y. & Sons Bespoke contemporary kimonos and accessories.

Best for Souvenirs

Hands Fascinating emporium of miscellaneous oddities.

Beams Japan Cool Japan-ese labels, original artwork and contemporary crafts.

Mega Donki For colourfully packaged snacks (like Kit Kats).

Kama-asa Artisan-made chef's knives, engraved while you wait.

Best for Food & Drink

Akomeya Beautifully packaged, artisanal cooking ingredients.

Coredo Muromachi High-end mall for homewares and gourmet food.

Imadeya Sake (and more) specialist with a tasting counter.

Best for Arts & Crafts

Itōya Ginza institution for stationery and art supplies.

Japan Traditional Crafts Aoyama Square Outstanding collection of Japanese artisan work.

Mokuhankan Quality *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints), both originals and replicas.

Ōedo Antique Market

Long-running, twice-monthly **Ōedo Antique Market** (大江戸骨董市; www.antique-market.jp) is the city’s best market and draws hundreds of dealers.

Parks & Gardens

Sprawling public parks, manicured strolling gardens, great lawns and groves of cherry blossoms – these are some examples of Tokyo's varied and wonderful green spaces. Many once belonged to the imperial family or the former feudal elite, but are now free to enter or cost just a few hundred yen.

PAUL ATKINSON/GETTY IMAGES ©

Cherry Blossoms

For a week or two, usually in late March and early April, Tokyo-ites toast spring with spirited parties, called *hanami,* under the blooming cherry trees. Ueno-kōen is the classic *hanami* spot. Yoyogi-kōen is for serious party people with barbecues and turntables. Shinjuku-gyoen is a grassy, family-friendly location for lazing under the blossoms. The Meguro-gawa (目黒川;) canal is for strolling under the blossoms, hot wine in hand.

Autumn Leaves

Another annual highlight is *kōyō* (autumn foliage season), which hits Tokyo around late November and early December. Koishikawa Kōrakuen is the most famous for this, with its spectacular maples. Other good spots include Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien and Shinjuku-gyoen. Meanwhile, see Tokyo's signature tree, the gingko, blaze gold along **Meiji-jingū Gaien Gingko Avenue**, near Gaienmae Station.

Best Parks

Yoyogi-kōen Not Tokyo's prettiest but definitely its most popular – always fun and always a crowd. (pictured)

Inokashira-kōen Woodsy strolling paths, pedal boats and an ancient shrine.

Institute for Nature Study Tokyo, re-wilded.

Best Gardens

Koishikawa Kōrakuen Classic example of traditional Japanese garden design.

Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien Bayside landscape garden with a teahouse.

Shinjuku-gyoen Former imperial retreat with mani-cured lawns and spectacular hothouse orchids.

Museums & Galleries

Tokyo's many excellent museums range from grand repositories of art and antiquities to tiny centres of devotion to one particular thing. The city is the centre of Japan's contemporary art scene; though it doesn't have a cohesive arts district, many galleries are clustered in Ginza and Roppongi.

CONNIEFLOU/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Need to Know

Many museums close on Mondays (or, if Monday is a national holiday, then the following Tuesday). Museums tend to close early, around 5pm or 6pm, and last admission is 30 minutes before closing. Take advantage of the free lockers (¥100 deposit) to stow your coat and bag. Concessions are often available for students and seniors; bring ID. National museums are better value than privately run ones; commercial galleries are free to enter.

Best Museums

Tokyo National Museum Home to the world’s largest collection of Japanese art.

Ukiyo-e Ōta Memorial Museum of Art Woodblock prints presented in seasonal, thematic exhibitions.

Nezu Museum Asian antiques in a striking contemporary building.

Mori Art Museum Contemporary shows by top Japanese and foreign artists. (pictured)

TOP Museum The city’s principal photography museum.

Asakura Museum of Sculpture, Taitō Studio turned museum and emblematic of early-20th-century Tokyo.

teamLab Planets Immersive digital installations, and the future of art?

Intermediatheque Experimental collection of natural wonders from the collection of Tokyo University.

Best Galleries

SCAI the Bathhouse Cutting-edge contemporary art in a renovated bath-house.

Shiseido Gallery Tokyo’s oldest gallery remains committed to up-and-coming artists.

Complex 665 Three leading commercial art galleries all in one building.

Shrines & Temples

Even Tokyo is full of Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples, which honour Japan's historically intertwined belief systems. While few Tokyoites today consider themselves religious, shrines and temples are still a place to celebrate annual rites, or maybe to pray for luck in business or love. At least, many would say, such a visit can't hurt.

COWARDLION/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Visiting Etiquette

Shrine and temple grounds are free to enter and open to all, so long as the gate is open. (A small fence at an entrance counts as a closed gate.) There are no strict rules (no dress codes, for example); however, there are some prescribed manners.

Taking pictures on the grounds is generally fine, but many shrines and temples do not want you taking photos inside the main halls (even from the outside). It's also respectful to keep your voice down.

The entrance to a shrine precinct is marked by a *torii* (a kind of pi-shaped gate with an extra horizontal beam) and proper etiquette is to bow before passing (and also to pass just right or left of centre). Shrines also have fonts where visitors wash their hands before approaching the main hall.

Temples, which tend to have much more elaborate gates, often have a slightly raised threshold, which you should step over.

Best Shrines

Meiji-jingū Tokyo's grandest Shintō shrine, set in a wooded grove.

Nezu-jinja One of Tokyo's prettiest, with a photogenic stretch of red *torii* gates (pictured)

Kanda Myōjin Prestigious shrine with a special connection to nearby Akihabara.

Ueno Tōshō-gū Gilded homage to the warlord that put Tokyo on the map, Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Best Temples

Sensō-ji The city's oldest and most famous Buddhist temple.

Kiyōmizu Kannon-dō A miniature of a famous Kyoto temple.

Under the Radar Tokyo

Spend too much time in one of Tokyo's heaving districts, like Shinjuku or Shibuya, and it's hard to imagine how anyone could live in a city like this. But tucked away here and there are many low-key neighbourhoods where locals gather. Below are a few favourites to explore; see also Shimo-Kitazawa and Naka-Meguro.

EDU VISION/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

Kōenji

Kōenji is proudly grungy. Its ethos of anti-consumerism is evident in the preponderance of second-hand shops with a punk spirit (pictured), older buildings, and cheap, zero-frills restaurants and bars, while its creative streak shows up in its street art and live music venues. Check out the street art that is part of the **Mural City Project** (www.mural-city.com) and **Kōenji Gādo-shita** (高円寺ガード下), a stretch of tiny restaurants and bars underneath the overhead JR line tracks.

Kiyosumi-Shirakawa

Kiyosumi-Shirakawa, in Tokyo's 'far east', is among the oldest parts of Tokyo – it's a former industrial centre that's now cast as an alternative to the city's west-side 'hoods. There are some major sights here, like the **Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo** (東京都現代美術館; www.mot-art-museum.jp); a whole coffee scene, try **Arise Coffee Roasters** (アライズコーヒーロースターズ; www.arise-coffee.jp); and some cool shops, **Babaghuri** (ババグーリ; www.babaghuri.jp).

Oku-Shibu

What locals call 'Oku-Shibu', which translates to something like 'Far Shibuya', is full of creative cafes, bistros and boutiques. It's the perfect antidote to the brashness and sensory overload of central Shibuya, and only about 15-minute walk away – just walk down the Kamiyama-chō *shōtengai* (shopping street) towards the Tomigaya intersection. Fuglen Tokyo – an outpost of a long-running Oslo coffee shop – is the area's principal gathering spot.

For Kids

Tokyo gets points for being safe, clean and orderly. Still, you have to work a little hard to make some top attractions entertaining for little ones. Older kids and teens, meanwhile, should get a kick out of Tokyo's pop culture; Shibuya and Harajuku in particular are packed with the shops, restaurants and arcades that local teens love.

OLIOPI/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Family Fun

Parks and gardens are naturally places to run around, but many have an added bonus: water elements where kids can traverse stone bridges and spot colourful koi and sunning turtles. Temple gates, like at Sensō-ji, are often guarded by fearsome deities, which can awe (or, er, terrorise) kids. Writing down prayer plaques or picking out amulets for friends and family back home is another way to make shrines and temples more appealing.

Unfortunately, Tokyo's main museums don't really have children's programmes, but we do recommend checking out the samurai swords and armour at the Tokyo National Museum. Rainy day? Try family karaoke. Or introduce the kids to your favourite video games at GiGO 3 in Akihabara, which has lots of vintage arcade games (plus UFO catchers).

Reward good behaviour at Kiddy-land or Tokyo Character Street.

Best Attractions for Kids

Ghibli Museum, Mitaka A portal to the magical world of famed animator Miyazaki Hayao (*Ponyo*, *Spirited Away*).

teamLab Planets Inter-active digital artworks that even little ones will appreciate.

Origami Kaikan See demonstrations of Japan's ancient art of paper folding, kids usually get a free souvenir.

Tokyo Dome Catch a baseball game.

Tokyo Dome City Thrill rides (plus more sedate rides for little ones) and a Ferris wheel with karaoke-equipped gondolas. (pictured)

LGBTIQ+ Travellers

Tokyo today is a fairly LGBTIQ+ tolerant city, having made great strides in the past couple of years towards openness and acceptance; still, many LGBTIQ+ people remain fearful of living publicly out – at least outside of safe spaces like Shinjuku-nichōme ('Nichōme' for short), the city's largest and liveliest gay quarter.

#DrinkWithPride
PVH
ENJOY DIVERSITY!
OIOI MARUI GROUP

MORUMOTTO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Law & Attitudes

Japan has no legal restraints on same-sex sexual activities, apart from the usual age restrictions. Outright discrimination is unusual; however, travellers have reported being turned away when checking into love hotels with a partner of the same sex. Such discrimination is illegal, but is rarely litigated. One thing to keep in mind: Japanese people, regardless of their sexual orientation, do not typically engage in public displays of affection.

What's Going On

The biggest event of the year is **Tokyo Rainbow Pride** (www.tokyorainbowpride.com; pictured), which includes a parade and is usually held in late April around Yoyogi Park. The organisation's twitter (@tokyo_r_pride) is also a good resource for other events.

Utopia Asia (www.utopia-asia.com) is a long-respected info source for LGBTIQ+ travellers.

Aiiro Cafe is a good place to start your Nichōme night; you can pick up lots of local intel about what's happening later, and just follow the crowd.

Best LGBTIQ+ Venues

Eagle (www.eagletokyo.com) Pose in front of manga artist Inuyoshi's great mural of beefy guys (and pick up a free copy of the artist's bilingual manga *Nippondanji*); also a popular happy-hour spot.

Bar Goldfinger (www.goldfingerparty.com) A long-running ladies' spot (but open to all, save for Saturdays) with a lowbrow-chic decor and fun events, like karaoke.

Arty Farty (アーティ ファーティ; www.instagram.com/artyfarty_annex/) Come one, come all to shake a tail feather on the (admittedly small) dance floor. It gets going later in the evening.

Responsible Travel

Tokyo being huge, the city has so far largely been able to absorb the rising number of tourists. Still, there are potential tension points between travellers and locals. There are also steps you can take to reduce your impact on the local – and global – environment.

VASSAMON ANANSUKKASEM/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Use Public Transport

Japan's public trans-port system is among the best in the world; there's little reason not to use it. Some guesthouses offer bike rentals (often for free), or try to tap into one of the city's bike-sharing schemes, like **Docomo Cycle** (https://docomo-cycle.jp).

But Be Mindful About It

Locals expect tourists to make certain gaffes (visitors will likely be surprised to learn what *isn't* considered impolite in Japan). But there are a few sticking points – like large luggage on public transport. This is expected on airport express trains but not on regular lines, and especially not during rush hour.

Locals typically send their luggage ahead via courier. **Yamato Transport** (www.global-yamato.com/en/hands-free-travel) is a reliable service, with counters in the arrival halls at Narita and Haneda airports. Look for the black cat logo.

Honour Reservations

Another common complaint comes from the restaurant industry is no-shows.

If you cannot make your reservation, phone (or have your accommodation call for you); otherwise the restaurant takes the loss on the ingredients bought specifically for your party – and may hesitate to accept reservations from overseas guests in the future. Some restaurants now only accept reservations from hotel concierges.

Less Tuna & Eel, Please

Limit your consump-tion of seafood that is threatened by over-fishing, such as *unagi* (eel) and *maguro* (tuna) – including *toro* (fatty tuna belly).

Carry Your Own Water Bottle

Japanese tap water is potable, so bring your own bottle and download the app **mymizu** (www.mymizu.co) to access free refill spots around the city. Electric kettles are standard in accommodation, so bring a thermos too, and make tea or coffee to go.

Refuse Packaging

Tell shop clerks *'Fukuro wa irimasen'* (I don't need a bag), or just hold up a reusable shopping bag to show you've already got one.

Separate Your Waste

Japan takes waste separation seriously. Street bins are rare, but you might encounter them at convenience stores, cafes, fast-food restaurants or your accommodation. Common categories include: burnable (燃えるゴミ), non-burnable (燃えないゴミ), can (カン), glass bottle (ビン) and PET bottle (ペットボトル).

Skip Vending Machines

While they're a ubiqui-tous part of Japan's urban identity, they eat up a considerable amount of energy.

Book Local

Book accommodation at small, family-run inns through **Japanese Guesthouses** (www.japaneseguesthouses.com).

Four Perfect Days

Day 1

Visit Meiji-jingū, Tokyo’s signature Shintō shrine. Then stroll down stylish Omote-sandō, lined with stun-ning contemporary architecture. Drop by the Ukiyo-e Ōta Memorial Museum of Art, followed by lunch at Maisen.

Walk to Tokyo’s most photogenic (and chaotic) intersection, Shibuya Crossing, and follow Shibuya Center-gai to find supreme souvenir-hunting ground Hands.

Take the train to Shinjuku and grab an early dinner in Omoide-yokochō. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building observatories stay open until 11pm for free night views. Afterwards, enjoy late-night drinks (and maybe some ramen, too) in Golden Gai (pictured).

JONATHAN STOKES/LONELY PLANET ©

Day 2

Breakfast on takeaway food at Tsukiji Market then walk over to bayside landscape garden Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien. Explore Ginza's art galleries, luxury boutiques, cafes and chic lunch spots, like Shiseido's Salon de Café.

Catch an act of kabuki at Kabukiza, or head over to Marunouchi to stroll the grounds of the Imperial Palace (pictured), replete with old castle moats and towers. Pop into one of the neighbourhood's excellent teahouses, like Ippuku & Matcha, and shop for gourmet goods at Coredo Muromachi.

Call it a night after a traditional meal at Nihonbashi Tamai, or perhaps after cocktails at the sky-high **Mandarin Bar**.

PANWASIN SEEMALA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Day 3

Start with the highlights of the Tokyo National Museum and a stroll through Ueno-kōen (pictured) before lunching at historic Inshōtei (reservations recommended). Continue on to the charming neighbourhood of Yanaka, with its vintage buildings and retro shopping street Yanaka Ginza.

Get to Asakusa by mid-afternoon in time to visit Tokyo's top temple Sensō-ji. Then explore Asa-kusa's side streets, packed with shops selling traditional crafts and foodstuffs.

Toast the day at one Tokyo's oldest bars, Kamiya Bar, then pick your pleasure for an evening meal – perhaps *okono-miyaki* at Sometarō, or grade-A *wagyū* (Japanese beef) at Asakusa Imahan (reservations recommended).

WEE-LO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Day 4

Reserve a 10am slot to visit the magical Ghibli Museum, Mitaka, then walk through Inokashira-kōen to Kichijōji Station, where you can pick up the Chūō line.

Head east to **Akihabara**, where you can ride go-karts, play retro video games and feast on ramen. If that's not your thing, take the Sōbu line a few more stops for the peaceful traditional garden, Koishikawa Korakuen. Clean up afterwards with an onsen dip at nearby Spa LaQua and ride the Thunder Dolphin at Tokyo Dome City (pictured) if you dare.

If you've still got energy to pour into a last night out, head to Roppongi. Contemporary art hot spot Mori Art Museum stays open until 10pm. Afterwards, dive into the neigh-bourhood's infamous nightlife, and make sure you get in a round of karaoke.

CHRISTOPHER PB/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Need to Know

For detailed information, see Survival Guide

Currency

Japanese yen (¥)

Language

Japanese

Visas

Generally not required for stays of up to 90 days; check www.mofa.go.jp.

Money

Convenience stores and post offices have international ATMs. Credit cards are widely accepted, but keep some cash on hand.

Mobile Phones

Prepaid data-only SIM cards and portable wi-fi routers are available for purchase or rent at the airports and electronics stores in town.

Time

Japan Standard Time (GMT/UTC plus nine hours)

Tipping

Tipping is not common in Japan, though top-end restaurants and bars will add a 10% service charge to your bill.

Daily Budget

Budget: Less than ¥10,000

Dorm bed: ¥3500

Temples and markets: free

Bowl of noodles: ¥1000

24-hour subway pass: ¥800

Midrange: ¥10,000–25,000

Double room at a business hotel: ¥15,000

Museum entry: ¥1000

Dinner for two at an *izakaya* (Japanese pub-eatery) with drinks: ¥8000

Top End: More than ¥25,000

Double room in a four-star hotel: from ¥35,000

Sushi-tasting menu: ¥20,000

Fancy cocktail: ¥2000

Taxi ride back to the hotel: ¥3000

Advance Planning

Three months before Purchase tickets for the Ghibli Museum, Mitaka; lock in a reservation at an exclusive restaurant.

One month before Book tickets online for theatre and sporting events, activities, courses or tours, and also any other restaurants you can book online; check for discount tickets schemes for getting to/from the airport.

When you arrive Look for maps, English-language city magazines and discount coupons for attractions at airports and hotels; have your accommodation help you reserve restaurants without online booking options.

Arriving in Tokyo

✈ From Narita Airport

An express train or highway bus to central Tokyo costs around ¥3200 (one to two hours). Pick up tickets at kiosks inside the arrivals hall (no advance reservations required). Fixed-fare taxis average ¥27,500.

✈ From Haneda Airport

Frequent trains and buses (¥300 to ¥1250, 30 to 45 minutes) to central Tokyo run from 5.30am to midnight; there are infrequent night buses (around ¥2000) for late arrivals. Fixed-fare taxis average ¥8000.

🚆 From Tokyo Station

Connect from the shinkansen (bullet train) terminus here to the JR Yamanote line or the Marunouchi subway for desti-nations around central Tokyo.

Getting Around

Tokyo’s public transport system is efficient, reliable, clean and generally safe. Of most use to travellers is the train and subway system, which is easy to navigate thanks to English signage.

Subway

The quickest and easiest way to get around central Tokyo. Runs 5am to midnight.

M
東京メトロ 丸ノ内線きっぷうりば
Tokyo Metro Marunouchi Line Tickets
丸ノ内線
Marunouchi Line
A7~A10·B7~B13
A11~A14

Subway station, Marunouchi line | TUPUNGATO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Train

Japan Rail (JR) Yamanote (loop) and Chūō-Sōbu (central) lines service major stations. Runs 5am to midnight.

Taxi

Expensive, but the only option after midnight. Easy enough to hail from the street, though you can summon one with Uber (only licensed taxis appear on the app in Japan).

Tokyo Neighbourhoods

Marunouchi & Nihombashi

Ginza & Tsukiji

Roppongi & Akasaka

Ebisu, Meguro & Daikanyama

Shibuya

Harajuku & Aoyama

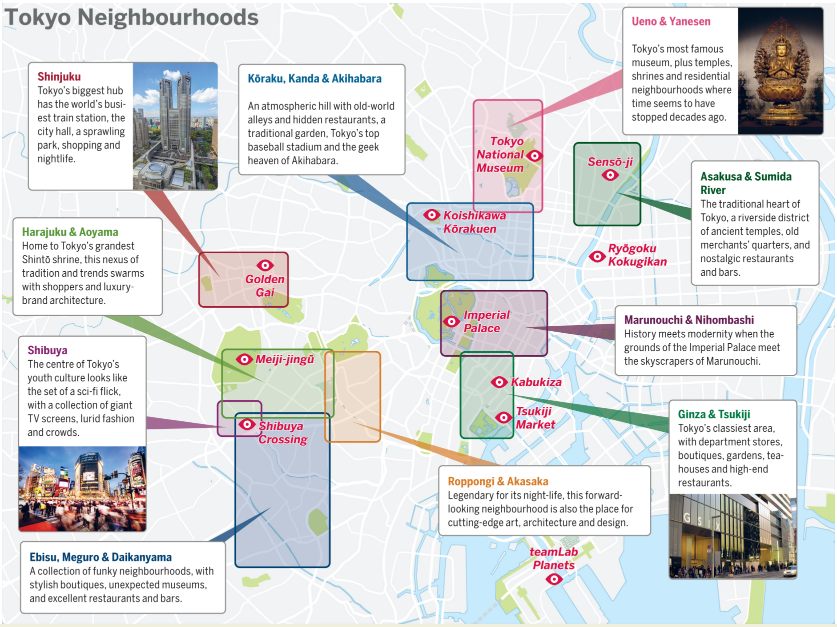
Shinjuku

Kōraku, Kanda & Akihabara

Ueno & Yanesen

Asakusa & Sumida River

Tokyo Neighbourhoods



Shinjuku
Tokyo's biggest hub has the world's busiest train station, the city hall, a sprawling park, shopping and nightlife.

Kōraku, Kanda & Akihabara
An atmospheric hill with old-world alleys and hidden restaurants, a traditional garden, Tokyo's top baseball stadium and the geek heaven of Akihabara.

Ueno & Yanesen
Tokyo's most famous museum, plus temples, shrines and residential neighbourhoods where time seems to have stopped decades ago.

Harajuku & Aoyama
Home to Tokyo's grandest Shintō shrine, this nexus of tradition and trends swarms with shoppers and luxury-brand architecture.

Asakusa & Sumida River
The traditional heart of Tokyo, a riverside district of ancient temples, old merchants' quarters, and nostalgic restaurants and bars.

Marunouchi & Nihombashi
History meets modernity when the grounds of the Imperial Palace meet the skyscrapers of Marunouchi.

Shibuya
The centre of Tokyo's youth culture looks like the set of a sci-fi flick, with a collection of giant TV screens, lurid fashion and crowds.

Ginza & Tsukiji
Tokyo's classiest area, with department stores, boutiques, gardens, teahouses and high-end restaurants.

Roppongi & Akasaka
Legendary for its night-life, this forward-looking neighbourhood is also the place for cutting-edge art, architecture and design.

Ebisu, Meguro & Daikanyama
A collection of funky neighbourhoods, with stylish boutiques, unexpected museums, and excellent restaurants and bars.

Top Experiences

- Imperial Palace
- Tsukiji Market
- Kabukiza
- Teamlab Planets
- Shibuya Crossing
- Meiji-jingū
- Golden Gai
- Koishikawa Kōrakuen
- Tokyo National Museum
- Sensō-ji
- Ryōgoku Kokugikan

Marunouchi & Nihombashi

The Imperial Palace is Tokyo's geographic centre, and its sprawling grounds include public green spaces, castle ruins and art museums. Nearby Marunouchi is a high-powered business district; it's Tokyo's establishment at its finest, with glossy skyscrapers and monumental architecture, but also restaurants, bars and shops for the office workers who hold it all together.

Tokyo Station | ESB PROFESSIONAL/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

The Short List

➡*Imperial Palace* *Exploring the castle moats and palace gardens that* *surround the emperor's home.*

➡*Intermediatheque Discovering a fascinating, eclectic collection of curiousities.*

➡*National Museum of Modern Art Getting schooled in modernism, Japanese-style.*

➡*Ippuku & Matcha Visiting a trendy tea salon with takeaway* matcha *lattes and a bookable teahouse experience.*

➡*Coredo Muromachi Wandering around this classy mall full of gourmet and lifestyle goods shops.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote and Chūō lines converge at Tokyo Station; the Yamanote line also stops at Yūrakuchō Station.

S Only the Marunouchi goes to Tokyo Station, but lots of other lines serve nearby stations like Ōtemachi and Hibiya. The Ginza line takes you to Nihombashi and Mitsukoshimae stations.

Top Experience

Stroll the Grounds of the Imperial Palace

The Imperial Palace is home to Japan's emperor and his family. You can't actually enter the palace, but you can freely visit some parts of the sprawling grounds, which include gardens and remnants of the feudal-era castle that stood here before. An official tour gets you a little more access to the palace.

GUILLERMO OLAIZOLA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

皇居, Kōkyo

http://sankan.kunaicho.go.jp

admission free

S Chiyoda, Hanzōmon, Marunouchi or Tōzai line to Ōtemachi, exits C13b & C10

☑

Palace Tours

➡Free palace tours (lasting 1¼ hours) take you to a few places not open to the general public. You'll get to see the outside of the **Kyūden**, which houses the throne room, but you won't get to actually enter any buildings.

➡Tours depart from the palace's **Kikyō-mon** (桔梗門) at 10am and 1.30pm Tuesdays through Saturdays, but not on public holidays nor afternoons from late July through August – check the website for the complete schedule (there are other exceptions).

➡Reserve a spot online up to one month in advance. A limited number of walk-ins are also accepted; arrive up to an hour before the start time and take a number.

➡Make sure you have your passport with you to pass security.

➡Download the free app (www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-event/app.html) to follow along in English.

The Shogun's Castle

The Imperial Palace occupies the site of Edo-jō, the Tokugawa shogunate's castle. When Edo-jō was completed in 1636 – a massive undertaking that required transporting heavy granite stones from around the country and digging an elaborate system of moats – it was the largest fortress in the world. When the shogunate fell in 1868, the emperor moved in (and moved from Kyoto to Tokyo). A few years later, the castle burned and a new palace was built in its place. But whatever was left of the old castle – some walls, gates and keeps, and much of the moats – has since been restored and maintained, and can be seen on the perimeter of the grounds.

You may not be able to see much of the palace, but these centuries-old structures make the visit worth it. Turn the page for a walking tour that takes you past some of the highlights.

Imperial Palace East Garden

The **Imperial Palace East Garden** (東御苑; Kōkyo Higashi-gyoen) is the only part of the inner compound that can be visited without joining the tour, and is also highly recommended. Crafted from part of the original castle compound, the gardens were opened to the public in 1968. Here you can get up-close views of the massive stones used to build the original castle walls, and even climb the **ruins of the main keep** (Tenshu-dai), off the upper lawn. The lawn is where the Honmaru (central part of the castle) was once located; now it's a lovely spot to relax.

Another highlight is **Ninomaru Grove**, a forested expanse that recreates the natural environment of the Musashino Plain, to the west of Tokyo (and now mostly suburban sprawl). There's a historic teahouse and a pond with some spectacularly coloured koi here.

Walking Tour

Highlights of the Imperial Palace Grounds

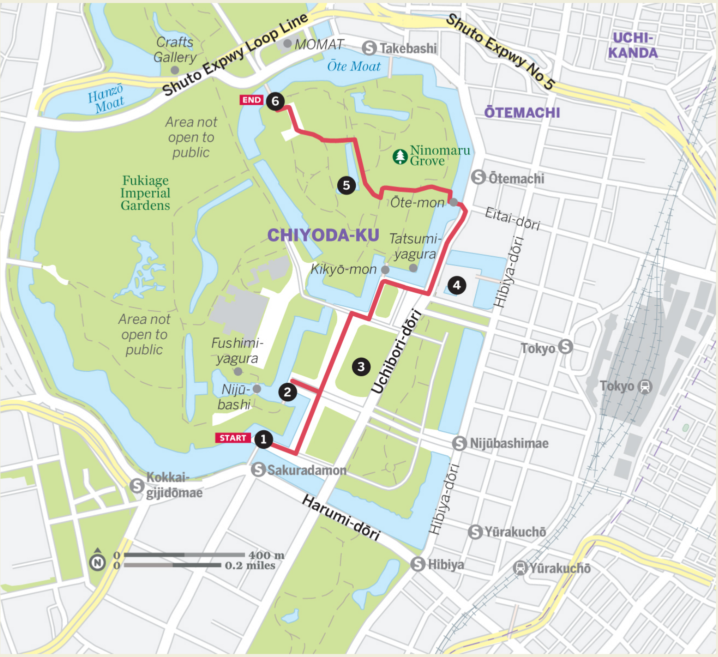
See the highlights of the Imperial Palace – what's open to the public without booking a tour – as well as some of the monumental remains of the castle, Edo-jō, that once stood here. You'll start at the gate, Sakurada-mon, which has its own subway station (on the Yurakuchō line, exit 3), but Kasumigaseki and Hibiya stations are nearby as well.

Walk Facts

Start Sakurada-mon

End Kitahanebashi-mon

Length 3km; two hours


Crafts Gallery
Shuto Expwy Loop Line
MOMAT
Takebashi
Ōte Moat
Shuto Expwy No 5
UCHI-KANDA
Hanzō Moat
END
6
ŌTEMACHI
Area not open to public
Ninomaru Grove
Fukiage Imperial Gardens
5
Ōtemachi
Ōte-mon
Eitai-dōri
CHIYODA-KU
Tatsumi-yagura
Kikyō-mon
4
Hibiya-dōri
Area not open to public
Fushimi-yagura
Uchibori-dōri
3
Tokyo
Tokyo
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❶

Sakurada-mon

Some 36 grand gates once surrounded Edo-jō, of which 11 remain. **Sakurada-mon** is the largest (and also the site of a famous historical assassination). Here, and elsewhere on the grounds, multilingual sign boards fill in the details. Look behind you, meanwhile, to see the headquarters of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police – often referred to as Sakurada-mon (in the same fashion as Scotland Yard).

❷

Megane-bashi

Follow the path with the moat on your left until you see the double arches of the bridge, **Megane-bashi** – so nicknamed because the arches reflected in the water create the appearance of spectacles (‘megane’ in Japanese). There’s another famous bridge, **Nijū-bashi**, behind it; both belong to the Imperial Palace era, built in the late 19th century. Today, this is the official entrance to the palace, where heads of state travel by horse and carriage to meet with the emperor and empress. Behind the bridges, you can see one of the three remaining castle watchtowers, **Fushimi-yagura**.

❸

Kōkyo-gaien Plaza

With the castle moat and stone ramparts on your left, soon on your right will be a large grassy expanse – **Kōkyo-gaien Plaza** – with some 2000 immaculately maintained Japanese black pine trees, which were planted in the late 19th century. And, in the background, the looming towers of Marunouchi, one of Tokyo’s principal business districts.

❹

Wadakura Fountain Park

The gate, **Kikyō-mon**, is as far as you can go without signing up for the official palace tour. Instead, head across the street to **Wadakura**

Fountain Park. This plaza has two fountains built to commemorate the weddings of the current emperor and empress (in 1995) and the previous imperial couple (in 1961). One of the fountains puts on a display at 20 past the hour; the other at 40 past the hour. There's a good view of the watchtower **Tatsumi-yagura** from here, as well as a rest house and information centre.

❺

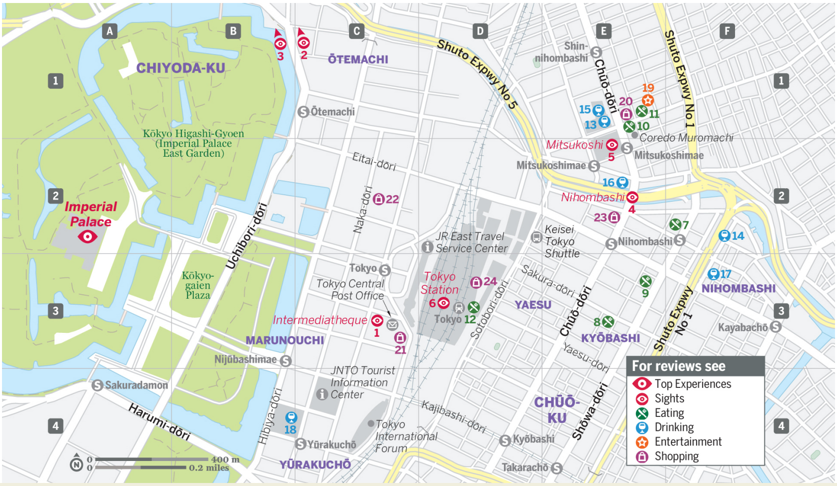
Imperial Palace East Garden

Walk along the main road with the moat on your left until you reach **Ōte-mon**, once the principal gate for entering Edo-jō and the now the main entrance to the Imperial Palace East Garden.

❻

Kitahanebashi-mon

After exploring the gardens, you can opt to exit via **Kitahanebashi-mon**, the 'northern drawbridge gate' (though it's now fixed to the ground), from where it is just a short walk to both the National Museum of Modern Art **(MOMAT;**) and the Crafts Gallery.


A
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CHIYODA-KU
ŌTEMACHI
Kōkyo Higashi-Gyoen (Imperial Palace East Garden)
Imperial Palace
Kōkyo-gaien Plaza
Uchibori-dōri
Ōtemachi
Eitai-dōri
Naka-dōri
Shuto Expwy No 5
Shin-nihombashi
Chūō-dōri
Shuto Expwy No 1
Coredo Muromachi
Mitsukoshi
Mitsukoshimae
Nihombashi
JR East Travel Service Center
Keisei Tokyo Shuttle
Tokyo
Tokyo Central Post Office
Tokyo Station
Intermediatheque
Sotobori-dōri
Sakura-dōri
YAESU
KYŌBASHI
NIHOMBASHI
Kayabachō
MARUNOUCHI
Nijūbashimae
Sakuradamon
Harumi-dōri
JNTO Tourist Information Center
Hibiya-dōri
Yūrakuchō
YŪRAKUCHŌ
Tokyo International Forum
Kajibashi-dōri
Yaesu-dōri
CHŪŌ-KU
Kyōbashi
Shōwa-dōri
Takarachō
400 m
0.2 miles
For reviews see
Top Experiences
Sights
Eating
Drinking
Entertainment
Shopping

Top Experiences

Imperial PalaceA2

Sights

1IntermediathequeC3

2National Museum of Modern Art (MOMAT)C1

3Crafts GalleryB1

4NihombashiE2

5MitsukoshiE2

6Tokyo StationD3

Eating

7TaimeikenF2

8Yoshino-zushi HontenE3

9Nihonbashi TamaiE3

10Tsuruya YoshinobuE1

Nemuro Hanamaru(see 21)

11Nihonbashi Dashi Bar HanareE1

12Tokyo Ramen StreetD3

Drinking

13Ippuku & MatchaE1

14AoF2

15Mandarin BarE1

16Toyama BarE2

17Omnipollos TokyoF3

18Chashitsu KabokuB4

Entertainment

19SuigianE1

Shopping

20NinbenE1

21KITTEC3

22Higashiya man MarunouchiC2

23KuroeyaE2

24Tokyo Character StreetD3

Sights

◉Intermediatheque

MUSEUM

This fascinating collection of scientific specimens and rarities is drawn from the collection of the prestigious University of Tokyo. Just as beguiling as the 19th-century botanical illustrations and taxidermy *onaga-dori* (an ornamental chicken with a fantas-tically long tail that was in vogue in the 17th century) is the museum's design, which looks to have been inspired by Victorian-era cabinets of curiosities. The museum is attached to the mall, KITTE. (インターメディアテク; www.intermediatheque.jp)

◉National Museum of Modern Art

MUSEUM

Tokyo's National Museum of Modern Art (MOMAT) covers art from the Meiji period (1868–1912) onwards – after Japan opened up to the West – and exhibitions impart a sense of how modern Japan (and the modern Japanese aesthetic) developed through painting, photography, sculpture and video works. Don't miss the 'Room with a View' for a panorama of the Imperial Palace East Garden. The museum closes between exhibitions. (国立近代美術館, Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan; www.momat.go.jp)

◉Crafts Gallery

MUSEUM

This red-brick building, an annex of MOMAT, stages excellent exhibitions of *mingei* (folk crafts): ceramics, lacquerware, bamboo, textiles, dolls and much more. Sometimes the works are historical; sometimes they are contemporary – including some crafted by Japan's officially designated 'living national treasures'. The museum closes between exhibitions. (国立工芸館; www.momat.go.jp)

Nihombashi

BRIDGE

The first Nihombashi, which crosses the Nihombashi-gawa, was built in 1603. Its current iteration – unfortunately some-what obscured by the overhead expressway – is this 1911-vintage granite bridge, with distinctive bronze statues by Watanabe Osao. Most famous are the unusually winged and dragon-like *kirin* – a kind of mythological chimera. (日本橋)

Mitsukoshi

HISTORIC BUILDING

Mitsukoshi's venerable Nihom-bashi branch was Japan's first department store (and got its start as a kimono purveyor in 1673). It's a grand affair with an entrance guarded by bronze lions and a magnificent statue of Magokoro, the goddess of sincerity, rising up from the centre of the ground floor. For the full effect, arrive at 10am for the bells and bows that accompany each day's opening. There's a nice roof garden, too. (三越; www.mitsukoshi.co.jp)

Tokyo Station

LANDMARK

Tokyo Station is the city's central rail terminus and a local landmark. It celebrated its centenary in 2014 with a major renovation that saw Kingo Tatsuno's original red-brick structure (on the Marunouchi side) expertly restored. Underneath it is 'Tokyo Station City', a vast and bewildering network of shopping and dining arcades. (東京駅; www.tokyostationcity.com)

Tokyo Station | SEAN PAVONE/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Eating

Taimeiken

JAPANESE

¥

This classic restaurant, open since 1931, specialises in *yōshoku* – Western cuisine adapted to the Japanese palate. Its signature dish is *omuraisu* (an omelette stuffed with ketchup-flavoured fried rice), to which you can add a side of borscht and coleslaw for the very retro price of ¥50 each. The *tampopo omuraisu* was created for Itami Jūzō's cult movie.

It's easier to get a seat on the 2nd floor, where the prices are higher, but the old-school atmosphere on the 1st floor is worth the wait if there's a queue. (たいめいけん; www.taimeiken.co.jp)

Yoshino-zushi Honten

SUSHI

¥¥

Unassuming Yoshino-zushi, in business since 1879, has an impressive claim to fame: it was here that *toro* (fatty tuna) debuted as a sushi topping. The restaurant could have capitalised on this, going high-end and exclusive; instead, it chose to remain a good-value neighbourhood shop. Come for the excellent and exceedingly reasonable lunch set; reservations essential for dinner. (吉野鮨本店; www.yoshinozushi.net)

Nihonbashi Tamai

JAPANESE

¥¥

Anago (seafaring eel) has long been considered a super-food – rich in vitamins A and E (and, fortunately, not endangered like its freshwater cousin *unagi*). Here it's served in lacquerware boxes (a style known as *hakomeshi*), prepared either grilled or boiled – sample both styles by asking for half and half. The small restaurant has a wooden signboard over the door.

There's also a small branch in the basement of Coredo Muromachi (Bldg 2). (玉ゐ本店; www.anago-tamai.com)

Tsuruya Yoshinobu

SWEETS

¥

This is the Tokyo outpost of one of Kyoto's more esteemed creators of *wagashi,* traditional Japanese sweets made of rice flour, bean paste and sugar. While the ingredients may be simple, the designs – of seasonal motifs, such as flowers and leaves – are spectacular. Sit at the counter to watch the in-house patissier make the sweet of your choice, served with tea. (鶴屋吉信; www.tsuruyayoshinobu.jp/en)

Nemuro Hanamaru

SUSHI

¥

Nemuro is a fishing port in far eastern Hokkaidō (Japan's northern island), and visiting the original *kaiten-zushi* (conveyor-belt sushi restaurant) there earns you some serious bragging points. But really, you can just go to this convenient branch inside the mall, KITTE. The trade-off is that there's usually a (long) queue. Take a number and spend the wait time at Intermediatheque. (根室花まる; www.sushi-hanamaru.com)

Nihonbashi Dashi Bar Hanare

JAPANESE

¥

This casual restaurant from long-time producer of *katsuo-bushi* (dried bonito flakes) Ninben naturally serves dishes that make use of the umami-rich ingredient. Set meals, with dishes such as hearty miso soups and *dashi takikokomi gohan* (rice steamed in stock), are good value, and healthy to boot. (日本橋だし場はなれ; www.ninben.co.jp/hanare)

Tokyo Ramen Street

RAMEN

¥

Eight hand-picked *rāmen-ya* (ramen shops) operate branches in this basement arcade on the Yaesu side of Tokyo Station. All the major styles are covered – from *shōyu* (soy-sauce base) to *tsukemen* (cold noodles served on the side). A few open early for breakfast. (東京ラーメンストリート; www.tokyoeki-1bangai.co.jp/ramenstreet)

Naka-dōri Hangout

Two decades ago Marunouchi was a drab business district bereft of people on weekends (save for the sad souls stuck at the office). Today it’s one of Tokyo’s most attractive neighbourhoods. Vital to that transformation was the redevelopment of **Naka-dōri** (map), a lovely tree-lined avenue. It’s closed to cars between 11am and 3pm on weekdays (and until 5pm on weekends) when tables are set up; food vendors (and even musicians) some-times make an appearance. Chashitsu Kaboku and Higa-shiya man Marunouchi, which both have takeaway options, are here.

Drinking

Ippuku & Matcha

TEAHOUSE

This takeaway counter sells *matcha* (powdered green tea) from Uji (near Kyoto), which you can sip on the adjacent terrace. But there’s more: a back door leads to a tiny teahouse where you can sample different varietals, served as tasting sets in beautiful *edo-kiriko* (locally produced cut-glass) cups. Book ahead for the teahouse. (www.ippukuandmatcha.jp)

Ao

LOUNGE

This swanky little salon – with red velvet banquettes and barely-there lighting – has a unique cocktail focus: tea and traditional Chinese medicine. The Sidecar, for example, is made with aged roasted tea and fortifying spices like cinnamon and ginger. And if you just want tea, they serve that, too. It’s inside boutique hotel K5; front desk staff will show you the way. (www.instagram.com/ao_k5_tokyo)

Mandarin Bar

BAR

Tokyo’s luxury hotel bars outdo themselves competing with one another, but the Mandarin Oriental’s might just be our favourite: managing to be both cool (sleek surfaces, crisp geometry and floor-to-ceiling windows) and comfy (slouchy seats in lush textiles). Oh, and those views over the city from the 37th floor. Reservations recommended. (マンダリンバー; www.mandarinoriental.com/tokyo/nihonbashi/fine-dining/bars/mandarin-bar)

Toyama Bar

BAR

This small, stylish counter bar offers a selection of sakes from breweries located in Japan’s Toyama prefecture, across the alps from Tokyo and bordering the Japan Sea. You can order good-value tasting sets, which come with English tasting notes. Pick up a bottle of anything you like at the attached shop. (トヤマバー; www.toyamakan.jp)

Omnipollos Tokyo

CRAFT BEER

With its psychedelic designs and outré menu – passion fruit cheesecake sour anyone? – Omnipollos Tokyo is certainly an experience. It’s inside a charming old wooden building, which formerly housed an *unagi* (freshwater eel) restaurant (the interior, meanwhile, is electric blue). The Kabutochō area of Nihombashi is on the rise, and there are some other cool spots nearby. (www.omnipollostokyo.com)

Chashitsu Kaboku

TEAHOUSE

Run by famed Kyoto tea producer Ippōdō, which celebrated 300 years of business in 2017, this teahouse is a fantastic place to sample top-quality *o-*

cha (green tea). It's also one of the few places in Tokyo that serves *koicha* (thick tea), which is even thicker than ordinary *matcha* (powdered green tea). (喫茶室 嘉木; www.ippodo-tea.co.jp)

Entertainment

Suigian

PERFORMING ARTS

This elegant dinner theatre stages performances of traditional Japanese performing arts, including *nō, kagura* (sacred dance) and *Kyo-mai* (Kyoto-style traditional dance). The performers all belong to well-established schools, and prices depend on who is performing. Reservations recommended. Later in the evening the space morphs into a bar. Look for the entrance near Fukutoku-jinja, behind Coredo Muromachi 2. (水戯庵; www.suigian.jp/en/)

Shopping

Ninben

FOOD & DRINKS

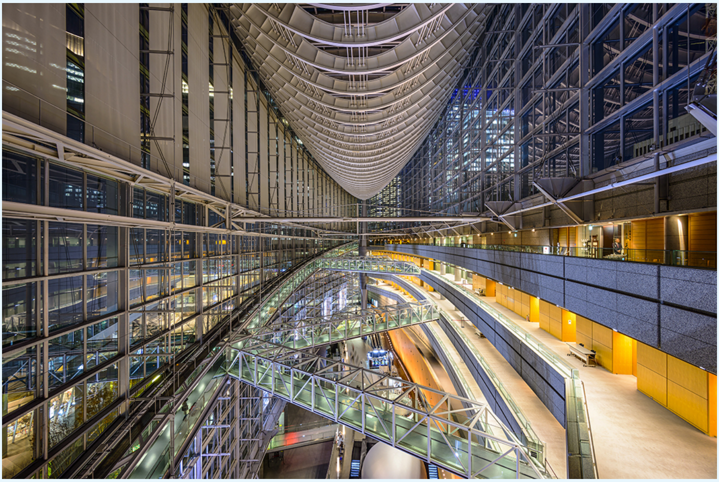
Tokyo's original fish market was in Nihombashi, on the banks of the eponymous river. That's ancient history, but some old vendors are still around – like Ninben, which has been producing *katsuo-bashi* (dried bonito flakes, a key ingredient in Japanese cooking) for over three centuries. Purchase high-quality Japanese cooking staples here, and see pros shaving blocks of dried bonito in the window.

There's also a small counter where you can purchase *dashi* (stock made from *katsuo-bushi*) by the cup for ¥100 – perfect on a cold day. (にんべん; www.ninben.co.jp)

Tokyo International Forum

Tokyo International Forum (東京国際フォーラム; map; www.t-i-forum.co.jp) is a convention and arts centre but also an architectural marvel: designed by Rafael Viñoly (in 1989), the eastern wing looks like a glass ship plying the urban waters. Just as interesting to visitors (and locals) is the plaza out the front: on weekdays between 11.30am and 2pm food trucks amass to feed area office workers (join them; there are tables set up). There's also a **night market** (with even more food trucks) about once a month (https://www.t-i-forum.co.jp/en/stall).

On the first and third Sunday of the month (usually; check the schedule), the plaza hosts the **Ōedo Antique Market** (www.antique-market.jp). It's one of Tokyo's best markets, with vintage kimono, antique ceramics and various other collectibles and curios (all usually good quality).



Tokyo International Forum | ESB PROFESSIONAL/SHUTTERSTOCK ©; ARCHITECT RAFAEL VIÑOLY

KITTE

MALL

Kitte is one of Tokyo best malls: not too big, and with several excellent homewares and lifestyle goods shops. The design is cool, too: it's within the 1930s-vintage former Tokyo Central Post Office. One shop to check out is the **Good Design Store**, which features products that have won Japan's prestigious Good Design Award. Also here: Intermediatheque and Nemuro Hanamaru. (www.jptower-kitte.jp)

Higashiya man Marunouchi

SWEETS

Higashiya specialises in traditional, seasonal Japanese confections with a contemporary edge. The *yokan* (a kind of jelly made from red bean, agar and sugar), for example, might be spiked with coconut. Everything is beautifully packaged and perfect for gifts. There's also a small selection of gourmet teas and elegant serving ware. (www.higashiya.com)

Kuroeya

ARTS & CRAFTS

Nihombashi is known for its venerable arts and crafts shops and Kuroeya is a perfect example: it's been selling lacquerware products for over 300 years. While many items are for serious collectors, you can also find very reasonably priced soup bowls and tea cups. Enter from the side street, parallel to the river. (黒江屋; www.kuroeya.com)

Tokyo Character Street

TOYS

Some 20 shops line this corridor in the basement of Tokyo Station, each specialising in a different character franchise – from Studio Ghibli, Mitaka to Sanrio and Pokémon to Doraemon. Actually the line-up is often changing so you don't really know what you are going to get. It's on the Yaesu side of the station, near Tokyo Ramen Street. (東京キャラクタースト

リート; www.tokyoeki-1bangai.co.jp)

Coredo Muromachi

Coredo Muromachi (コレド室町; map; www.mitsui-shopping-park.com/urban/muromach) is a stylish, up-market mall spread over three buildings and a terrace complex. It’s focused more on homewares and food than clothes, and there are branches of some famous artisan shops and gourmet purveyors here. Ninben (Bldg 1) and its sister restaurant Nihonbashi Dashi Bar Hanare (Bldg 2) are here. So is Tsuruya Yoshinobu (Bldg 3).

Ginza & Tsukiji

Ginza is Tokyo’s most polished neighbourhood, a luxury fashion centre resplendent with department stores, art galleries and exclusive restaurants; the city’s principal kabuki theatre, Kabukiza, is here, too. Tokyo’s main fish market may no longer be based at nearby Tsukiji, but this area remains packed with shops selling gourmet cooking supplies and street food stalls.

Ginza Maison Hermès | FRANCESCO BONINO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

The Short List

➡ *Tsukiji Market Sampling all kinds of delicious eats at this historic,* *bustling market.*

➡*Kabukiza Being dazzled by the technicolour spectacle of kabuki drama.*

➡*Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien Sipping green tea in this beautiful, 17th-century bayside garden.*

➡*Kyūbey Experiencing high-end Ginza sushi.*

➡*Cafe de l'Ambre Being introduced to Ginza's vintage cafe scene.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote line stops at Shimbashi Station (south end of Ginza) and Yūrakuchō Station (north end of Ginza).

S The Ginza, Hibiya and Marunouchi lines connect at Ginza Station. For Tsukiji, take either the Hibiya line to Tsukiji or the Ōedo line to Tsukijishijō.

⛴ Water buses run down the Sumida-gawa from Asakusa to a special dock at Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien.

🏃 Ginza is a pleasure to walk around; Marunouchi is within walking distance, too.

Top Experience

Visit Tsukiji Market

What is today known as Tsukiji Market was once just the unofficial 'outer market' to the official Tokyo Central Wholesale Market (the 'inner market'). The wholesale market relocated to new digs in 2018, but the outer market – a warren of stalls selling gourmet-level cooking ingredients along with some delicious street food – remained, and is still, a must-see.

GUILLERMO OLAIZOLA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

www.tsukiji.or.jp

6-chōme Tsukiji

🕒 5am-2pm, closed irregularly

S Hibiya line to Tsukiji, exit 1

☑

Top Tips

➡We recommend getting here as early as you can manage. Most stalls open from around 5am and shut down by 2pm. That said, entry to **Tsukiji Uogashi** is reserved for professionals until 9am (except for the the 3rd-floor food court, which you can access from 7am). Many shops also still keep to the old wholesale market closing days: Sundays, public holidays, and the odd Wednesday.

➡Pick up an English map of the market from **Information Center Plat Tsukiji** (ぷらっと築地), where you can also buy Tsukiji souvenirs.

➡The multilingual market website has more info on Tsukiji's history and other advice for visiting (including etiquette tips).

Take a Break

There are many wonderful spots to eat and drink right here in the market; see for expert recommendations.

Tsukiji Today

Tsukiji is emblematic of a Tokyo of a different era, when small businesses and a sort of organised chaos ruled; it is also a culture unto itself, with its own codes and shorthand language. But it has had a rough couple of years. First, the wholesale market moved to Toyosu, near teamLab Planets. Then the pandemic hit; restaurants were ordered to close or reduce hours, which meant that longtime market vendors – who supply ingredients to some prestigious Tokyo kitchens – felt the pinch, too.

Other stalls had already started to sell street food to tourists, and, well, they were then out of luck as well. In other words (at least at the time of research), once-vibrant Tsukiji was hanging on by a thread. You might visit Tokyo again in the future, but the time to visit Tsukiji is now.

Navigating the Market

There is a lot going on here: vendors selling colourful pickles and raw ingredients like *katsuo-bushi* (dried bonito flakes); small *kaisen-don* (assorted raw seafood atop a bowl of rice) restaurants; and takeaway stalls offering up all sorts of tasty things. There are also newer developments – perhaps a hint of the Tsukiji of the future? – like the indoor arcade Tsukiji Uogashi, where pros and home cooks alike can purchase sashimi-grade seafood and other wet-market staples. You can actually buy ingredients here to cook on the roof, which has barbecue facilities that you can rent out; it's a little complicated, but staff at the information centre can try to help. Some shops sell ready-made sushi takeaway, which you can also eat on the rooftop.

Don't miss the market's shrine, **Namiyoke-jinja** (波除神社; www.namiyoke.or.jp). When the shrine was first built in the 1600s, it was on the edge of the water – that's how much land reclamation has happened in Tokyo since. The name, aptly, means 'protection from the waves'.

Top Experience

See Kabuki at Kabukiza

Dramatic, highly stylised kabuki is Japan's most recognised art form. Kabuki developed in Tokyo (then known as Edo) during the 18th and 19th centuries, and an afternoon at the theatre has been a favourite local pastime ever since. Descendants of the great actors of the day still grace Tokyo stages, drawing devoted fans. Established in 1889 (and reconstructed in 2013), Kabukiza is Tokyo's dedicated kabuki theatre.

MANUEL ASCANIO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

歌舞伎座

www.kabukiweb.net

4-12-15 Ginza

tickets ¥4000-20,000, single-act tickets ¥800-2000

🚇 Hibiya line to Higashi-Ginza, exit 3

☑

Top Tips

➡Tickets can be bought online (though this was temporarily suspended at the time of research), over the phone or direct from the box office, which is located in the base-ment of the theatre (where it connects to the subway). Check for current information on ticket sales, including the availability of *makumi* (single-act standing tickets), on the theatre’s English website.

➡Rent a headset for explanations in English; the recording begins 10 minutes before each act, with back-ground information about the play.

🍴

Take a Break

It’s tradition to eat a *bentō* (boxed meal) at the theatre during the intermission. Buy one (around ¥1000 to ¥2000) inside the theatre, at stalls in the subway station, or in the food hall of nearby Mitsukoshi department store.

The Plays

Kabuki plays are drawn from a repertoire largely developed during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Popular subjects include famous historical accounts, the conflict between love and loyalty and stories of star-crossed love ending in double suicide. There is little pretence of reality in kabuki; it’s ruled by aesthetics and plays to the senses rather than the intellect. Kabuki has been likened to a moving woodblock print, and when the actors pause in dramatic poses – called *mie* – the whole stage really does look fit to be framed.

The Actors

Kabuki actors train from childhood and descendants of the great Edo-era (1603–1868) actors still grace the stage, as sons follow their fathers into the family *yago* (kabuki acting house). These stars enjoy a celebrity on par with screen actors; some have earned the status of 'living treasure'. At pivotal moments in a performance, enthusiastic fans shout out the actor's *yago* – an act called *kakegoe*. There's also one of kabuki's most fascinating elements: the *onnagata* (male actors who specialise in portraying women), which came about because Edo-era laws forbade woman to take the stage.

Catching a Performance

Kabukiza holds twice-daily (or sometimes thrice-daily) performances 25 days out of the month, with a new line-up of acts each month. A full kabuki performance comprises three or four acts, usually from different plays, and lasts around four hours. Tickets for full performances go on sale one month in advance.

If four hours sounds too long, 90 sitting and 60 standing *makumi* (single act tickets; ¥800 to ¥2000, depending on the play) are usually reserved for sale on the day for each act; sale of these remained suspended at the time of research but is likely to resume in the future. You'd be at the back of the auditorium, but the views are still decent.

Walking Tour
Ginza Old & New

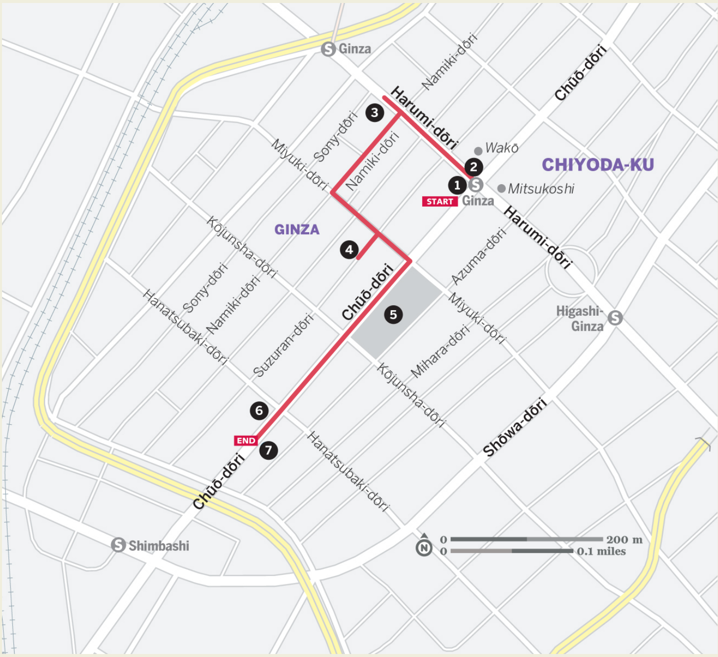
Since the turn of the last century, Ginza has been Tokyo's most sophisticated neighbour-hood, the place to see and be seen among a certain well-heeled set. This is where the classiest boutiques – many of which have fantastic window displays or are architectural attractions in their own right – are located. Also here: long-running galleries, public artworks, swanky malls and historic cafes.

Walk Facts

Start Ginza Station, exit A1

End Cafe Paulista

Length 1km; one to two hours



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Mitsukoshi
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Ginza
Harumi-dōri
GINZA
Kōjunsha-dōri
Azuma-dōri
Chūō-dōri
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Ginza Station

You’re heading for exit A1, but first take a moment to check out some of the neat art inside **Ginza Station**. Near exit B5 is a glittery work, **Crystal of Light** (2020), by internationally acclaimed artist and designer Yoshioka Tokujin. Closer to exit C1 is a colourful 1994 work of stained glass, **Paradise (Oasis in Ginza)**, by traditional Japanese artist Hirayama Ikuo.

❷

Ginza 4-chōme Crossing

Before it was eclipsed (internation-ally, at least) by Shibuya Crossing, this was Tokyo’s most famous intersection. From the station exit, look across the street at the extremely upmarket department store **Wakō**, in a grand old 1932 building. On the diagonal is Mitsu-koshi, another Ginza landmark; the 1914 bronze lion statue that guards the entrance is Ginza’s de facto meet-up spot, similar to Hachikō in Shibuya.

❸

Ginza Maison Hermès

The glass-block **Ginza Maison Hermès** (1998–2001), designed by Renzo Piano, is just one example of Ginza’s stunning retail architecture. On the 8th floor is contemporary art gallery **Le Forum**, which is free to enter. You have your choice of streets to reach the next stop, but we recommend **Namiki-dōri**, a tree-lined stretch home to some extremely exclusive bars and clubs.

❹

Dover Street Market

A department store as envisioned by Rei Kawakubo (of Comme des Garçons), **DSM** has seven floors of avant-garde brands, including several Japanese labels and every-thing in the Comme des Garçons line-up. The window and in-store displays are equally eye-catching.

❺

Ginza Six

The atrium of high-end mall **Ginza Six** (http://ginza6.tokyo) doubles as a soaring exhibition space (with installations from the likes of Kusama Yayoi and Kōhei Nawa). Meanwhile, head to the 3rd floor (by the Margiela store) for the best view of **Universe of Water Particles on the Living Wall** (2017), a permanent installation from digital art collective teamLab. As for shopping, our picks are Ginza Tsutaya Books and Imadeya.

❻

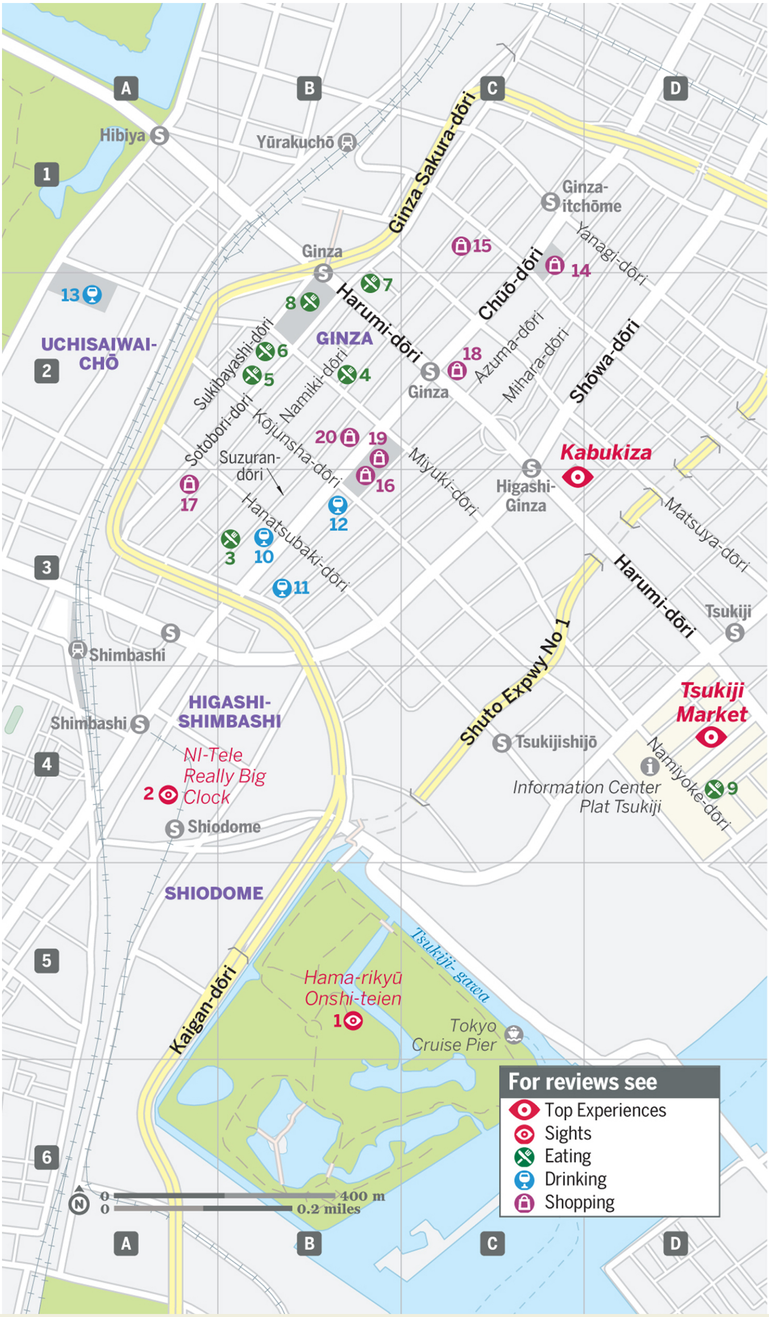
Shiseido Gallery

In the basement of the iconic, lipstick-red Shiseido Building, **Shiseido Gallery** (資生堂ギャラリー; www.shiseidogroup.com/gallery) is Japan's longest running contemporary-art gallery (since 1911). Free shows often feature up-and-coming Japanese artists. Upstairs is swanky lunch spot Salon de Cafe.

❼

Cafe Paulista

Tokyo's longest running cafe, in business since 1911 (though the building has been redone), **Cafe Paulista** has seen decades' worth of celebrity customers, from author Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to John Lennon.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Ginza Sakura-dōri
Ginza-itchōme
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Ginza
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Harumi-dōri
Chūō-dōri
13
UCHISAIWAI-CHŌ
GINZA
6
5
4
Sukibayashi-dōri
Namiki-dōri
18
Azuma-dōri
Mihara-dōri
Shōwa-dōri
Ginza
Sotobori-dōri
Kōjunsha-dōri
20
19
Suzuran-dōri
16
Miyuki-dōri
Kabukiza
Higashi-Ginza
17
12
Hanatsubaki-dōri
Matsuya-dōri
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Harumi-dōri
Tsukiji
Shimbashi
Shuto Expwy No 1
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Shimbashi
Tsukiji Market
Tsukijishijō
NI-Tele Really Big Clock
2
Information Center Plat Tsukiji
Namiyoke-dōri
9
Shiodome
SHIODOME
Tsukiji-gawa
Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien
1
Kaigan-dōri
Tokyo Cruise Pier
For reviews see
Top Experiences
Sights
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Top Experiences

Tsukiji MarketD4

KabukizaC3

Sights

1Hama-rikyū Onshi-teienB5

2NI-Tele Really Big ClockA4

Eating

3KyūbeyB3

4Tempura KondōB2

5Kagari HontenB2

6Ginza Sato YosukeB2

7Bird LandB2

8ApolloB2

9SushikuniD4

Drinking

10Salon de CaféB3

11Cafe de l’AmbreB3

12Ginza LionB3

13Old Imperial BarA2

Shopping

14ItōyaC1

15MujiC1

16ImadeyaB3

17	Takumi	A3
18	Mitsukoshi	C2
19	Ginza Tsutaya Books	B2
20	Uniqlo Ginza	B2

Sights

Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien

GARDENS

This beautiful garden, one of Tokyo's finest, is all that remains of a shogunate summer villa next to Tokyo Bay. There's a large pond with an island, connected by a causeway, upon which sits the teahouse **Nakajima no Ochaya**, where you can sip *matcha*. Don't miss the spectacularly manicured 300-year-old black pine tree near the Ote-mon entrance. (浜離宮恩賜庭園; www.tokyo-park.or.jp/teien/en/hama-rikyu)

NI-Tele Really Big Clock

PUBLIC ART

Miyazaki Hayao, Studio Ghibli, Mitaka's animation director, collab-orated with sculptor Kunio Shachi-maru on this fantastic, steampunk-style timepiece beside the entrance to Nippon Television Tower. It springs to life five times daily (six at weekends). (日テレ大時計; www.ntv.co.jp/shiodome/shop/tokei.html)

Eating

Kyūbey

SUSHI

¥¥¥

Kyūbey, in business since 1935, is one of Tokyo's prestige sushi restaurants, where each piece of *nigiri-zushi* (hand-pressed sushi) is made to perfection and delivered one at a time. But there's no snobbery here: staff speak English and the prices are reasonable – for Ginza, at least.

Reservations must be made through your accommodation. (久兵衛; www.kyubey.jp)

Tempura Kondō

TEMPURA

¥¥¥

Nobody in Tokyo does tempura vegetables like chef Kondō Fumio. The carrots are julienned to a fine floss; the corn is pert and juicy; and the sweet potato is comfort food at its finest. Courses include seafood, too. Lunch service is at noon or 1.30pm; last dinner booking is at 8pm. Reservations absolutely essential. (てんぷら近藤; https://tempura-kondo.com)

Kagari Honten

RAMEN

¥

Kagari changed the ramen game in the mid-2010s with its *tori paitan* – a chicken broth so rich with collagen it's almost opaque. Added to the bowl are delicate noodles, slices of juicy chicken and seasonal vegetables. Entrance is on the alley; it has white door curtains. (篝本店; www.instagram.com/kagari_honten)

Ginza Sato Yosuke

NOODLES

¥¥

A speciality of Akita, *inaniwa* udon are thinner than regular udon (wheat noodles), with a silky texture that is an absolute to joy to slurp. The Sato family have been making them for seven generations, so what you get here is pretty much perfection. The restaurant also serves other specialities (includ-ing sake) from Akita, a remote prefecture in northern Japan. (銀座

佐藤養助; www.sato-yoske.co.jp/en/shop/ginza)

Ginza Promenade

Go for a stroll along **Chūō-dōri** – Ginza's main drag – each weekend, when a long section of the road is traffic-free from noon to 5pm (until 6pm April to September).

Bird Land

YAKITORI

¥¥¥

Most *yakitori* restaurants fall into the 'cheap and cheerful' category. Not Bird Land: here chefs in whites grill heirloom free-range chicken (from Ibaraki prefecture), courses include servings of chicken liver pâté, and wine – not beer – is the drink of choice. Enter beneath Suit Company (yes, this is one of the upmarket Tokyo restaurants in a nondescript basement). Reservations recommended. (バードランド; www.ginza-birdland.sakura.ne.jp)

Apollo

GREEK

¥¥¥

We know you didn't come to Tokyo to eat Greek food, but hear us out: this Sydney import nails dishes like grilled octopus and fennel salad, taramasalata, and lamb shoulder with lemon and Greek yoghurt. The wine list is deep, the original cocktails excellent and, oh, you also get views over Ginza from the floor-to-ceiling windows. (www.theapollo.jp)

Sushikuni

SUSHI

¥¥

Kaisen-don (bowls of rice topped with a variety of raw fish) is a common dish served at shops all over Tsukiji Market. This one is our favourite – with generous servings of rich, creamy *uni* (sea urchin roe) and salty *ikura* (salmon roe). It's also open for dinner. (鮨國; www.instagram.com/tsukiji_sushikuni)

Breakfast at Tsukiji Market

Tsukiji is an ideal place to visit on your first morning in the city, when jet lag has you up nice and early.

Turret Coffee (www.instagram.com/turretcoffee) First stop: one of Tokyo's best coffee shops. Espresso is served here in vintage sake cups, and seasonal latte flavours include *azuki* (red bean) paste or strawberry mochi.

Yamachō (www.yamachou-matue.jp) This long-running market stall serves thick *tamago-yaki* (rolled omelettes) served warm and ready to eat on bamboo skewers. Tokyo-style *tamago-yaki* is traditionally sweet, while Kyoto-style is savoury.

Toritoh Tori Soba Stand (www.toritoh.com) The food court on the 3rd floor of **Tsukiji Uogashi** (築地魚河岸; https://uogashi.tsukiji-dainaka.com) has all kinds of offerings, but head to chicken-speciality shop Toritoh for chicken ramen and *karaage* (Japan-style fried chicken).

Matcha Stand Maruni (https://matchastandmaruni.com) *Matcha* lattes whipped to order here with a bamboo whisk, or try a toasty *hōjicha* (roasted green tea) latte.

Tips by Yukari Sakamoto, author of Food Sake Tokyo, @foodsaketokyo

Drinking

Salon de Café

CAFE

Shiseido’s Salon de Café is a classic Ginza spot for tea, decadent seasonal parfaits or a light meal (go for the dainty fried prawn sandwich). It has white tablecloths, soothing hues and seats you can sink into (while still somewhat retaining good posture). (サロンドカフェ; https://parlour.shiseido.co.jp)

Cafe de l’Ambre

CAFE

Local legend Sekiguchi Ichirō opened Cafe de l’Ambre in 1948, sourcing aged beans from all over the world and roasting them in-house long before it was trendy (and did so daily until he passed away at the age of 103 in 2018). The atmosphere hasn’t changed one bit: wood-panelled walls, pedestal tables and dainty coffee cups with saucers. (カフェドランブル; www.cafedelambre.com)

Ginza Lion

BEER HALL

So what if Sapporo’s beers are not among the best you can quaff in Tokyo? Japan’s oldest beer hall (from 1934) has a gorgeous art-deco interior (with glass mosaic murals) and an oom-pah-pah atmosphere, with waiters ferrying frothy mugs and plates of Bavarian-style sausages to the tables. (銀座ライオン; www.ginzalion.jp)

Old Imperial Bar

BAR

This is one of the few parts of the Imperial Hotel – to many still Tokyo’s most prestigious hotel – to feature some of the designs and materials used in the original 1923 Frank Lloyd Wright building (note the architectural drawing behind the cash desk). The menu of classic cocktails suits the vintage early-20th-century interior. (www.imperialhotel.co.jp/e/tokyo/restaurant/old_imperialbar)

Shopping

Itōya

STATIONERY

This famed, century-old Ginza establishment has floors of covetable notebooks, pens, agendas and greeting cards, including many items made of *washi* (Japan's traditional handmade paper). You can also find *tenugui* (hand towels, traditionally hand dyed or printed) and *furoshiki* (wrapping cloths) in gorgeous colours and patterns. (伊東屋; www.ito-ya.co.jp)

Muji

HOMEWARES

You could hear the collective swoon of all devotees of functional design when this massive Muji flagship opened in 2019. In addition to several floors carrying the brand's signature clothing, accessories and home-wares – simply elegant and utterly affordable – there's also a diner in the basement. There are smaller Muji branches all over Tokyo, including ones in Coredo Muromachi and Tokyo Midtown. (無印良品; https://shop.muji.com/jp/ginza)

Imadeya

ALCOHOL

Imadeya is a respected sake speciality store, but it carries more than that, including small batch *shōchū* (distilled alcohol usually made from sweet potatoes or barley) and other made-in-Japan spirits (like gin and whisky). Even better: there's a tasting counter (it's not a free service, though prices are reasonable). It's in the gourmet food hall in the basement of Ginza Six. (いまでや)

Takumi

ARTS & CRAFTS

You're unlikely to find a more elegant selection of traditional folk crafts, including toys, textiles and ceramics from around Japan. Ever thoughtful, this shop also encloses information detailing the origin and background of the pieces if you make a purchase. (たくみ; www.ginza-takumi.co.jp)

Mitsukoshi

DEPARTMENT STORE

Mitsukoshi is Ginza's most famous department store. The fashion is mostly from inter-national brands, but the 7th-floor homewares section has gallery-like displays of works by contemporary artisans, including ceramics and lacquerware (much of it affordable). It also has an excellent gourmet food hall in the basement. (三越; www.mitsukoshi.mistore.jp/store/ginza)

Ginza Tsutaya Books

BOOKS

This big, beautiful bookshop inside Ginza Six has a well-curated selection of art, architecture, design and travel books. Foreign-language titles are mixed in with the Japanese ones, arranged by theme. There's also a cafe, an art gallery and some stationery items for sale here. (銀座蔦屋書店; https://store.tsite.jp/ginza)

Ginza Tsutaya Books | AUGUST_0802/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Uniqlo Ginza

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Stop any Tokyoite on the street and odds are they're wearing at least one thing from Uniqlo, the ubiquitous retailer of indispensible basics. There are branches all over the city, but this is the larg-est, stocking everything in the current line-up (which usually includes some collaborations with designers and artists). (ユニクロ銀座店; www.uniqlo.com)

Top Experience

Enter a World of Art at teamLab Planets

International art collective teamLab has turned the museum experience on its head, first with its ground-breaking exhibition space teamLab Borderless and now with teamLab Planets, which is a collection of immersive spaces, where you literally enter the work of art. Once inside, the artworks shift, responding to your presence and beckoning you to interact with them.

TEAMLAB Floating Flower Garden: Flowers and I are of the same root, the garden and I are one © teamlab

https://planets.teamlab.art

6-1-16 Toyosu, Kōtō-ku

☑

Top Tips

➡Tickets are for timed entry; we recommend buying them in ad-vance online as only a limited number of visitors are allowed in at any one time.

➡Download teamLab’s app to unlock more ways to explore the artworks.

Take a Break

Adjacent to teamLab Planets and inside an installation, **Vegan Ramen UZU Tokyo** (https://vegan-uzu.com/pages/uzu-tokyo-en) serves tea, ice cream and pretty good vegan ramen.

Toyosu Market is a five-minute walk away and has some excellent sushi options, like **Daiwa Sushi** (大和寿司).

☑

Getting There

🚊 teamLab Planets is right in front of Shin-Toyosu Station on the Yurikamome line, or a 10-minute walk from Toyosu Station on the Yurakuchō subway line.

🚌 Coming from Marunouchi, Ginza or Tsukiji you can hop on the convenient 05-2 bus that runs along Harumi-dōri towards Tokyo Big Sight and stops at Shin-Toyosu Station on the way.

The Water Area

teamLab Planets has two main sections, the Water Area and the Garden Area (admission grants you access to both); you’ll enter the water area first. And by water, we mean water: you’ll be taking off your shoes and socks (they go in a locker) and rolling up your trousers to wade through calf-high pools.

In one such pool, digital koi (ornamental carp) – in fantastic colours and patterns – at times weave between your legs or scatter. In another work, visitors climb a sparkling waterfall. In another, light sculpture, mirrored floors (you can rent shorts to wear) create infinity rooms of crystal strands and seasonal floral projections.

The Garden Area

The Garden Area contains two works: a moss garden with ethereal ovoids (push them over and interact with them) and an absolutely enchanting room filled with more than 13,000 live orchids that you can explore (many consider this the highlight).

More Works by teamLab

At the time of research, teamLab Planets was scheduled to close at the end of 2023, but it may be around a little longer (the closing date has already been pushed back several times). Meanwhile, teamLab Borderless, which closed in 2022, is scheduled to reopen in central Tokyo. There are also a few public teamLab installations around Tokyo (and elsewhere). There is a digital waterfall cascading down several storeys inside the mall, Ginza Six, and a digital panel of seasonal blooms that changes throughout the day (and the year), inside KITTE.

See www.teamlab.art for up-to-date information on teamLab Planets, teamLab Borderless and any newer works and spaces that may have appeared since this guide was published.

Roppongi & Akasaka

Once synonymous with nightlife and general debauchery, the past two decades have seen Roppongi transform into a world-class destination for art and design. (Traces of the old Roppongi do remain, and there are plenty of bars, clubs and karaoke parlours to keep you going all night.) Akasaka, meanwhile, has always been a classy spot, day or night.

Tokyo Tower | VICHIE81/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

The Short List

➡*Mori Art Museum Contemporary-art exhibitions and sweeping views over the city atop Roppongi Hills’ Mori Tower.*

➡*21_21 Design Sight Cutting-edge art, architecture and design ideas in a striking Tadao Ando–designed building.*

➡*Complex 665 Three of Tokyo’s leading art galleries all in one spot.*

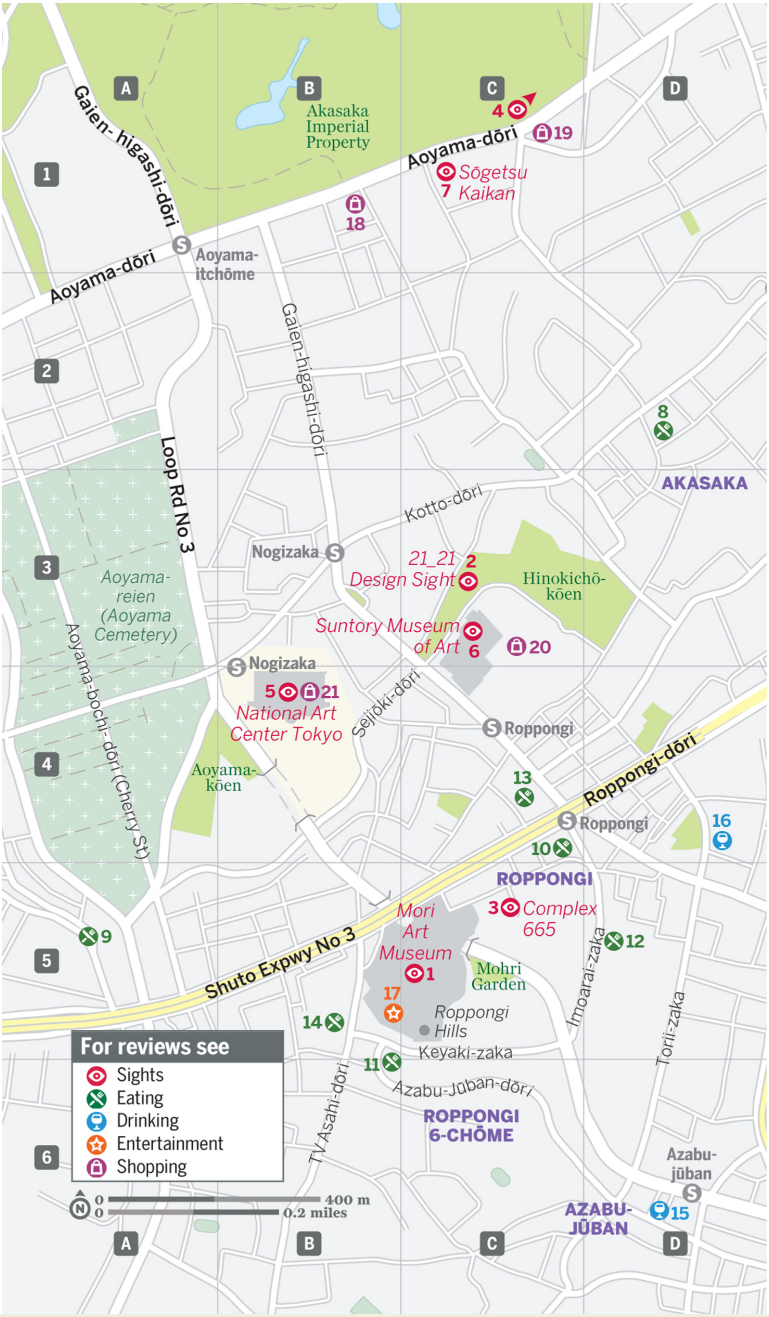
➡*Kikunoi A classic destination for* kaiseki, *Japan’s exquisite traditional haute cuisine.*

➡*Japan Traditional Crafts Aoyama Square Gallery-like shop for lacquerware, pottery and more.*

Getting There & Around

S The Hibiya and Ōedo lines run through Roppongi. The Chiyoda line stops at Nogizaka (with direct access to the National Art Center Tokyo) and Akasaka. Aoyama-Itchōme Station (Ginza, Hanzōmon and Ōedo lines) is also handy.

🚌 The convenient bus 1 runs between Shibuya and Shimbashi via Roppongi and Nishi-Azabu.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Gaien- higashi-dōri
Akasaka Imperial Property
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Aoyama-dōri
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Sōgetsu Kaikan
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Aoyama-itchōme
Aoyama-dōri
Gaien-higashi-dōri
8
AKASAKA
Loop Rd No 3
Kotto-dōri
Nogizaka
21_21 Design Sight
2
Hinokichō-kōen
Aoyama-reien (Aoyama Cemetery)
Suntory Museum of Art
6
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Aoyama-bochi-dōri (Cherry St)
Nogizaka
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Seijōki-dōri
Roppongi
Aoyama-kōen
13
Roppongi-dōri
Roppongi
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ROPPONGI
Mori Art Museum
3
Complex 665
9
Shuto Expwy No 3
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Mohri Garden
Imoarai-zaka
12
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Roppongi Hills
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Azabu-Jūban-dōri
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Tori-zaka
ROPPONGI 6-CHŌME
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AZABU-JŪBAN
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Sights

1	Mori Art Museum	C5
2	21_21 Design Sight	C3
3	Complex 665	C5
4	State Guest House, Akasaka Palace	C1
5	National Art Center Tokyo	B4
6	Suntory Museum of Art	C3
7	Sōgetsu Kaikan	C1

Eating

8	Kikunoi	D2
9	Butagumi	A5
10	Sougo	C4
11	Bricolage Bread & Co	B6
12	Jōmon	D5
13	Honmura-An	C4
14	Chinese Cafe 8	B5

Drinking

15	Gen Yamamoto	D6
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16	Two Dogs Taproom	D4

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17	Toho Cinemas Roppongi Hills	B5

Shopping

18Japan Traditional Crafts Aoyama SquareB1

19TorayaC1

20Tokyo MidtownC3

21Souvenir from TokyoB4

Sights

◉Mori Art Museum

MUSEUM

Mori Art Museum is one of Tokyo's leading spaces for contemporary art, taking up a whole floor at the top of Mori Tower in Roppongi Hills. It has no permanent exhibition; instead, large-scale, original shows introduce major local and global artists and movements. Past exhibitions have focused on the works of Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei and native son Murakami Takashi, as well as themes like AI, protest and urbanism. Unlike most museums, Mori Art Museum is open late – until 10pm (except Tuesdays).

Admission also includes entry to three smaller galleries, as well as the observatory, **Tokyo City View**. (森美術館; www.mori.art.museum)

◉21_21 Design Sight

MUSEUM

Exhibition and education space 21_21 Design Sight is dedicated to all forms of design – from architecture to product design to fashion (it was established by the late Issey Miyake, one of Japan's preeminent fashion designers). The striking concrete and glass building, erupting from the ground at sharp angles, was designed by Pritzker Prize–winning architect Tadao Ando. (21_21デザインサイト; www.2121designsight.jp)

Tokyo Tower

Tokyo Tower (東京タワー; www.tokyotower.co.jp/en.html) – painted bright orange and white in order to comply with inter-national aviation safety regulations – is an iconic sight *and* a shameless tourist trap.

When the broadcast tower made its debut in 1958 it was the tallest structure in the city, and a beacon of hope for a country still emerging from the ashes of WWII. It stands 333m tall – 13m taller than the Eiffel Tower, which was the inspiration for its design. Scrap metal salvaged from US Korean War tanks provided some of the steel for construction.

Tokyo now has much more impressive towers, offering even more dizzying views; but for a certain generation, Tokyo Tower remains a moving symbol of the city's rebirth. That said, it's better viewed from a distance – especially when it is illuminated at night – than actually visited. There are excellent views from Roppongi's Gaien Higashi-dōri, heading east.

Complex 665

GALLERY

This three-storey building tucked on a backstreet near Roppongi Hills is the shared location of three leading commercial galleries: **Taka Ishii** (www.takaishiigallery.com), **ShugoArts** (http://shugoarts.com) and **Tomio Koyama Gallery** (www.tomiokoyamagallery.com). Exhibitions cover a broad spectrum of Japanese contemporary art. Note that the galleries are closed in between exhibitions, and don't always coordinate show dates.

State Guest House, Akasaka Palace

PALACE

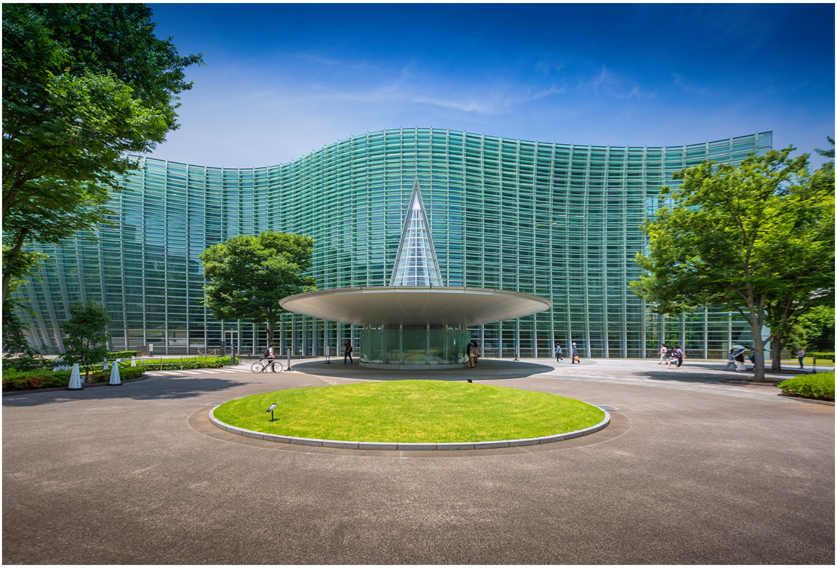
Check online for the opening schedule and somewhat complex admission details for this imperial palace and garden. Outside it's a dead ringer for London's Buckingham Palace. Inside, the tour route passes through four grandly decorated rooms – the most impressive being the **Kachō-no-Ma** (Room of Flowers and Birds), with Japanese ash panels inset with cloisonné panels – plus the entrance hall and main staircase. (迎賓館, 赤坂

離宮; www.geihinkan.go.jp/en/akasaka)

⦿National Art Center Tokyo

MUSEUM

The National Art Center has the country’s largest exhibition space for visiting shows, usually from prestigious inter-national institutions like Paris’ Musée de Cluny or Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum. But it also curates its own shows, often on contemporary Japanese art. No matter what’s on, the building itself is spectacular, with an awesome undulating glass facade designed by influential architect Kishō Kurokawa. The museum also has a fantastic gift shop, Souvenir from Tokyo. (国立新美術館; www.nact.jp)



National Art Center Tokyo | BULE SKY STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©; ARCHITECT: KISHŌ KUROKAWA

⦿Suntory Museum of Art

MUSEUM

This art museum nominally focuses on the decorative arts, things of beauty and purpose: Japanese ceramics, lacquerware, glass, dyeing, weaving and such. But recent exhibitions have also looked at different styles of Japanese painting and Buddhist sculpture. The museum, designed by architect Kengō Kuma, is located inside Tokyo Midtown. (サントリー 美術館; www.suntory.com/sma)

◉Sōgetsu Kaikan

ARTS CENTRE

Sōgetsu is one of Japan's leading schools of avant-garde *ikebana* – the centuries-old art of flower arranging. There are often exhibitions in the lobby, which is actually an indoor stone garden designed by the esteemed Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi. (草月会館; www.sogetsu.or.jp/e)

Roppongi Hills

Roppongi Hills (六本木ヒルズ; map; www.roppongihills.com), when it debuted in 2003, set the standard for 21st-century real-estate developments in Tokyo. Designed by Jerde – a California-based, global pioneer of post-modern mall design – it was intended to be something like a self-contained work-live-play urban village. There are now numerous such develops around Tokyo, which have proved polarising. Is it a future-forward utopia or a capitalist hellscape? Come decide for yourself.

There are other reasons to visit, too: Mori Art Museum is here, as are several public artworks. The most famous one is **Maman**, a 30ft-tall bronze spider sculpture by Louise Bourgeois. It's one of six castings from the original 1999 work, and has an amusing way of messing with the scale of the buildings, especially in photos.

Eating

Kikunoi

KAISEKI

¥¥¥

Kikunoi is one of Japan’s storied *ryōtei,* the high-class restaurants that serve *kaiseki* (Japanese haute cuisine). Its Akasaka branch is (relatively speaking) more casual and approachable than the main Kyoto restaurant. English-speaking staff are on hand to explain all the incredible seasonal delicacies served one at a time, each plated as works of art, over the two- to 2½-hour meal. Reservations are essential and best made through your accommodation. (菊乃井; www.kikunoi.jp)

Butagumi

TONKATSU

¥¥

Butagumi is a destination for *tonkatsu* (deep-fried pork cutlet) connoisseurs. The extensive menu features different cuts of pork sourced from all over Japan, complete with tasting notes – it’s terroir for *tonkatsu,* if you will. Finding the restaurant also feels like an accomplishment: it’s in traditional two-storey wooden building secreted on a side street in swanky Nishi-Azabu. (豚組; www.butagumi.com)

Sougo

JAPANESE

¥¥¥

Sougo is one of the few restau-rants in Tokyo that prepares *shōjin-ryōri* (Japanese Buddhist vegetarian cuisine). Not every-thing on the menu strictly adheres (it’s all good though); if you want the real deal, order the *shōji-kaiseki* course. Reservations for courses are essential; give at least two days' notice for dietary restrictions and allergies. (宗胡; www.sougo.tokyo)

Sougo | THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES ©

Bricolage Bread & Co

CAFE

¥¥

A collaboration between coffee shop **Fuglen** (www.fuglen.no), Michelin-starred restaurant L'Effervescence and Osaka-based bakery Le Sucré Coeur is naturally the perfect place for brunch. The thing to order here are the *tartines* (open-faced sandwiches), topped with, say, smoked salmon, *ikura* (salmon roe) and beetroot drizzled with salted plum sauce. Terrace seating is the cherry on top. (www.bricolagebread.com)

Jōmon

IZAKAYA

¥¥

Jōmon ticks all the boxes of a great *izakaya* (Japanese pub-eatery): cheek-to-jowl counter seating (or outdoor seating on overturned beer crates), good no-fuss food and a boisterous atmosphere. Hakata-style skewers – of meat and veggies – are charcoal grilled, and washed down with *shōchū* (strong distilled alcohol often made from potatoes), jars of which line the walls. It’s popular; reservations recommended. (ジョウモン; www.teyandei.com; ✍)

Honmura-An

SOBA

¥¥

This fabled soba shop, once located in Manhattan, now serves its handmade buckwheat noodles at this small, elegant shop on a Roppongi side street. It’s a restaurant for everyone: you can order noodle dishes á la carte – from humble *seiro-soba* (plain, cooled noodles) to soba topped with *uni* (sea urchin roe) – or splurge on seasonal tasting menus. Reserve ahead for dinner. (本むら庵; www.honmuraantokyo.com;)

Chinese Cafe 8

CHINESE

¥

For a taste of old Roppongi – the one that was more about debauch-ed nightlife than high-end malls – head to this beloved all-night Chinese restaurant known for its golden phallic decor, Peking duck served at any hour, and abrupt service (in that order). (中国茶房8; http://en.cceight.com/restaurant; ✍)

Drinking

Gen Yamamoto

COCKTAIL BAR

Gen Yamamoto takes the seasonal tasting menu concept and applies it to cocktails. Here they’re made with fruits and herbs, with the same kind of devotion to presentation seen at restaurants serving *kaiseki* (Japanese haute cuisine). Choose from sets of four, six or seven. And don’t worry, they’re designed to be savoured, not to get you sozzled (servings are small). The bar is just eight seats at a counter made from a 500-year-old Japanese oak.

Reservations (possible from one week in advance) are essential. (www.genyamamoto.jp)

These

LOUNGE

It’s pronounced *teh*-zeh, but is often just referred to as ‘the library bar’ (because the walls are lined with books). There’s a menu, but regulars are known to opt instead for a seasonal cocktail, choosing one or two fruits from the basket on the counter and a liquor base – it’s rare to be disappointed. Look for the torches out front. (テーゼ; www.these-jp.com)

Two Dogs Taproom

CRAFT BEER

This popular hangout has 24 taps, roughly half of which are devoted to Japanese craft beers. Pints (US-size) are reasonably priced (for Tokyo), and you can order tasting sets, too. The kitchen turns out decent pizzas and pub dishes to line your stomach.

International sporting events are shown live on several big screens (in which case you probably want to reserve ahead). (www.twodogs-tokyo.com; 📶)

Entertainment

✪Toho Cinemas Roppongi Hills

CINEMA

One of Tokyo's nicest and biggest cinemas (it has nine screens, some with 3D and 4D capability) screens all the latest domestic and international blockbusters – and occasionally special screenings of popular Japanese new releases with English subtitles.

Toho Cinemas Roppongi Hills is the main venue for the annual **Tokyo International Film Festival**, during which all films are screened with English subtitles. (TOHOシネマズ 六本木ヒルズ; https://tohotheater.jp)

Karaoke Time

Karaoke (pronounced ka-ra-ohkay) has long been a fixture of Japanese culture, typically sung with friends in private rooms rented by the hour. Sometimes karaoke is the reason for going out; more often it's where you end up at after the bars – all the big chains run all night (and have extensive English song lists). Karaoke parlours are everywhere, but are especially common in nightlife districts like Roppongi, Shibuya and Shinjuku. With colourful, illuminated signs spelling out カラオケ (karaoke), you can't miss them. The big chains:

Big Echo (ビッグエコー; https://big-echo.jp)

Karaoke-kan (カラオケ館; http://karaokekan.jp)

Uta Hiroba (歌広場; www.utahiro.com)

Pasela (パセラ; www.pasela.co.jp)

Prices are fairly comparable (Pasela is slightly more upmarket), but they do fluctuate: karaoke is cheapest during the day on weekdays (a great rainy-day option) and most expensive on Friday and Saturday nights. There are also good-value packages that include a few hours of room rental and unlimited drinks and/or food.

Shopping

Japan Traditional Crafts Aoyama Square

ARTS & CRAFTS

Supported by the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, this is as much a showroom as a shop, exhibiting a broad range of traditional crafts from around Japan, including lacquerwork boxes, woodwork, cut glass, textiles and pottery. There are some exquisite heirloom pieces here, but also beautiful items at reasonable prices. (伝統工芸 青山スクエア; https://kougeihin.jp)

Toraya

FOOD & DRINKS

Founded in the 16th century, traditional Kyoto confectionary Toraya has long been patronised by the Imperial Court, giving it a cachet that other sweet-makers can only dream about. This is its newish Tokyo flagship store, which also has a cafe and a small gallery with special exhibitions about Japanese sweet-making.

There are other branches of Toraya and its cafes around Tokyo, including one at Tokyo Midtown. (とらや; https://global.toraya-group.co.jp)

Tokyo Midtown

MALL

This upmarket mall is good for homewares from Japanese designers. Check out the **Cover Nippon** (gorgeous and gallery-like) and **Wise-Wise** (clever designs and easier on the wallet), both on the 3rd floor of the Galleria section.

The Suntory Museum of Art is also here. Behind the complex is **Hinokichō-kōen** (檜町公園). Formerly a private garden attached to an

Edo-period villa, Hinokichō was reopened as a public park. The adjacent **Midtown Garden** is a cherry-tree-lined grassy space that makes a perfect spot for a picnic; events such as free yoga classes are sometimes held here. (東京ミッドタウン; www.tokyo-midtown.com)

Souvenir from Tokyo

GIFTS & SOUVENIRS

The gift shop at the National Art Center Tokyo deserves special mention on account of its expertly curated and ever-changing selection of home-grown design bits and bobs, which make for unique souvenirs. You don’t need to pay admission to the museum to enter the shop. (スーベニアフロムトーキョー; www.souvenirfromtokyo.jp)

Ebisu, Meguro & Daikanyama

Ebisu and Meguro are gateways to largely residential (some arty, some upmarket, some both) districts, where Tokyo takes on a more human scale. There are some excellent art museums in here, and Ebisu in particular has a dynamic dining and bar scene – worth checking out even if you pass on the sights. Nearby Daikanyama has trendy boutiques, cafes and an unhurried pace.

Meguro-gawa | TOM BONAVENTURE/GETTY IMAGES ©

The Short List

➡*TOP Museum Checking out Tokyo's top destination for photography* *by masters and new talents.*

➡*Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum Browsing decorative arts exhibitions in a showpiece art-deco estate.*

➡*Meguro-gawa Strolling this leafy canal lined with fashionable shops.*

➡*Tonki Tasting* tonkatsu *(crumbed pork cutlet) perfection created here for over 80 years.*

➡*Gem by Moto Settling in at this boutique sake bar.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote line stops at Ebisu and Meguro stations. The Tōkyū Tōyoko line runs from Shibuya to Daikanyama and Naka-Meguro; some Fukutoshin subway trains continue on the Tōyoko line.

S The Hibiya line stops at Ebisu and Naka-Meguro. The Namboku and Mita lines stop at Meguro.

🚶 It's fairly easy to walk between Ebisu, Daikanyama and Naka-Meguro; Meguro is a bit more out of the way.

Walking Tour

An Afternoon in Naka-Meguro

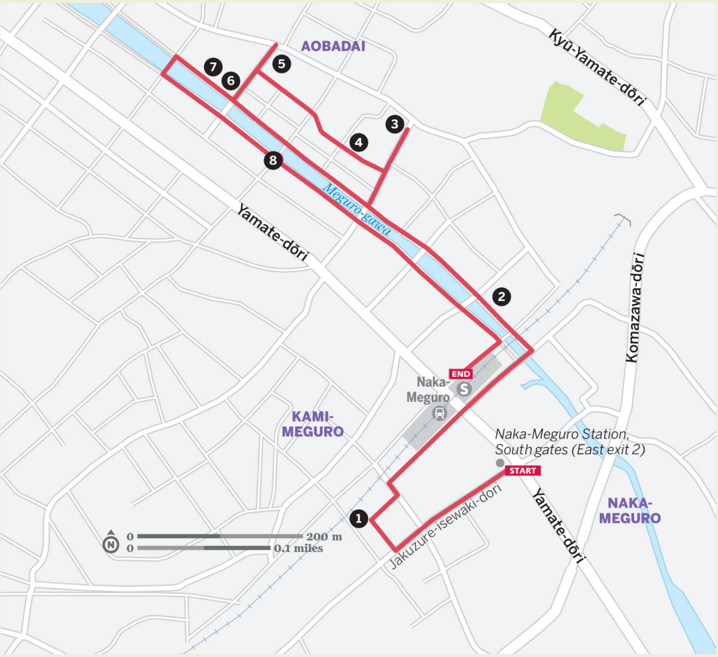
Naka-Meguro is a fashionable residential enclave strung out along a leafy canal, the Meguro-gawa, which gives the neighbourhood a laid-back, almost village-like vibe. Many creative types live here and their tastes are reflected in the boutiques found alongside or near the canal. Naka-Meguro gets a late start; don't expect cafes or boutiques to open before 11am (and sometimes not until noon).

Walk Facts

Start Naka-Meguro Station, South gates (East exit 2)

End Meguro-gawa

Length 1.5km, one to two hours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Meguro-gawa
Yamate-dōri
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Komazawa-dōri
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Naka-Meguro
KAMI-MEGURO
Naka-Meguro Station, South gates (East exit 2)
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❶

Onibus Coffee

First a slight detour for a caffeine hit: local hot spot **Onibus Coffee** perfectly nails two of Tokyo's current obsessions: third-wave coffee and vintage wooden build-ings. The beans here are roasted in-house; the cafe is in a former tofu shop. There's outdoor seating, too.

❷

Vase

Head back to the station, cross the street and you'll soon hit the Meguro-gawa and then **Vase** – a perfect example of one of Naka-Meguro's tiny, impeccably curated boutiques. It stocks a mix of vintage and one-off pieces from designers unknown to anyone but the most attentive hype-beast, plus the occasional trunk show. It's in a little white house.

❸

Isego Honten

Take a detour to **Isego Honten**, a more convenient branch of a 300-year-old Yanesan sake speciality shop. It also has choice Japanese wines, whiskies and spirits, and staff can help you pick out something within your budget. There's an in-store bar (open from 3pm, or noon on Sundays) for sake by the glass. Closed on Tuesdays.

❹

Kinto Store

Heading back towards the river, on your right you'll pass **Kinto Rec Store** and then, around the corner, **Kinto Store**. Kinto is a Japanese lifestyle brand that makes stylishly minimalist homewares, and is particularly known for its slow-pour coffee stands (those are at the main store). Kinto Rec Store sells stuff for outdoors, like thermoses.

❺

SML

Artisan homewares shop **SML** takes a gallery-like approach, with always-changing works on displays. It’s particularly good for earthy pottery. Closed on Fridays.

❻

...research General Store

Back on the river, **...research General Store** sells original made-in-Japan outdoor wear and gear for the most stylish of mountain hermits (or what designer Koba-yashi Setsumasa calls ‘anarcho-mountaineers’ and ‘saunter punks’). Closed on Mondays.

❼

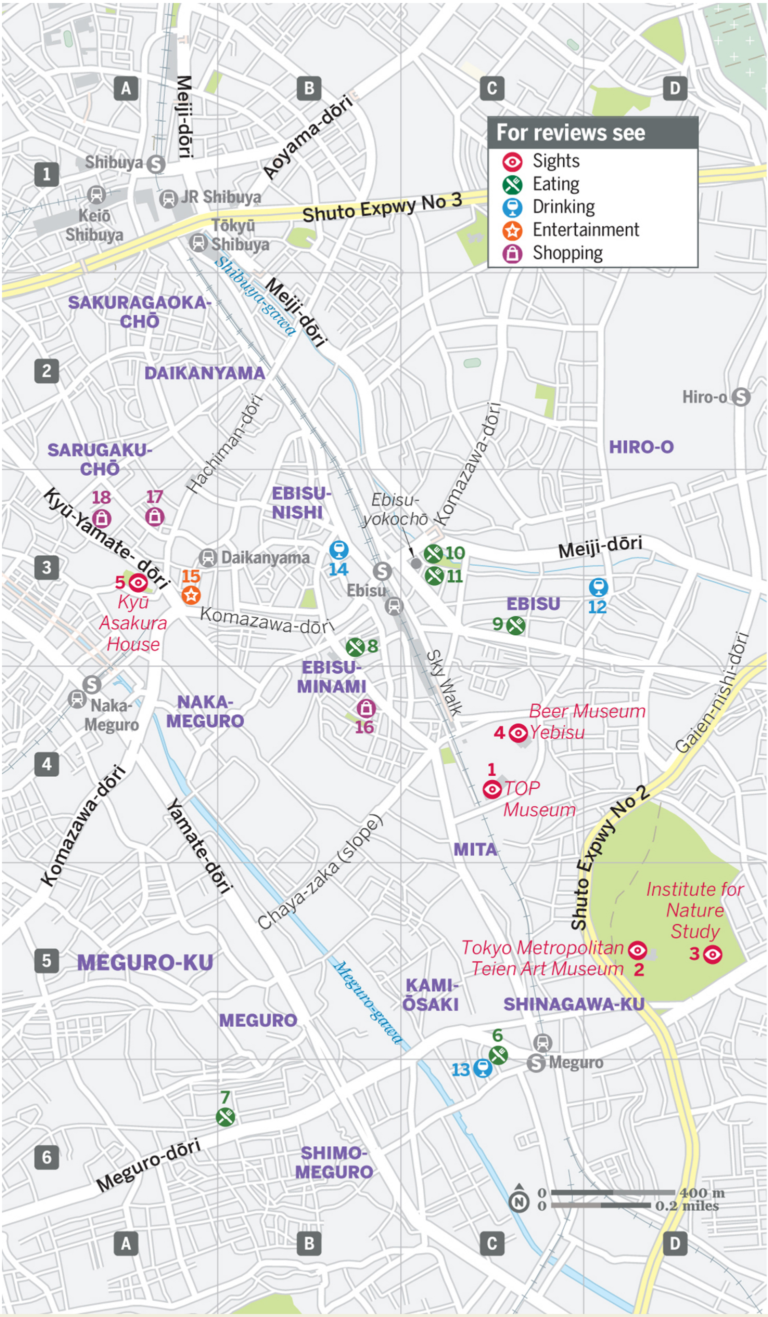
Cow Books

Next door, **Cow Books** is a Naka-Meguro institution, a secondhand bookshop specialising in counter-culture works, rare first editions, small print runs and experimental writing. Most titles are in Japanese, but there is usually a small selec-tion of English-language and art books; the atmosphere is universal. Closed on Mondays.

❽

Meguro-gawa

Finish with a final **Meguro-gawa** stroll – this time on the opposite side of the canal, where more boutiques await – back to Naka-Meguro Station, or off in search of more boutiques and cafes down other side streets.


For reviews see
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Meiji-dōri
Aoyama-dōri
Shibuya
JR Shibuya
Keiō Shibuya
Tōkyū Shibuya
Shuto Expwy No 3
Shibuya-gawa
SAKURAGAOKA-CHŌ
DAIKANYAMA
Hachiman-dōri
SARUGAKU-CHŌ
Kyū-Yamate-dōri
18
17
EBISU-NISHI
Ebisu-yokochō
Komazawa-dōri
Hiro-o
HIRO-O
Daikanyama
14
Ebisu
10
11
Meiji-dōri
EBISU
12
9
5
Kyū Asakura House
15
Komazawa-dōri
8
EBISU-MINAMI
Sky Walk
Naka-Meguro
NAKA-MEGURO
16
Beer Museum
4
Yebisu
Galen-nishi-dōri
1
TOP Museum
Komazawa-dōri
Yamate-dōri
Chaya-zaka (slope)
MITA
Shuto Expwy No 2
Institute for Nature Study
Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum
2
3
MEGURO-KU
Meguro-gawa
KAMI-ŌSAKI
SHINAGAWA-KU
MEGURO
6
13
Meguro
7
Meguro-dōri
SHIMO-MEGURO
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Sights

1TOP MuseumC4

2Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art MuseumD5

3Institute for Nature StudyD5

4Beer Museum YebisuC4

5Kyū Asakura HouseA3

Eating

6TonkiC5

7KabiB6

8Yakiniku ChampionB3

9IppoC3

10AfuriC3

11OucaC3

Drinking

12Gem by MotoD3

13Another 8C6

14Bar TrenchB3

Entertainment

15UnitA3

Shopping

16KapitalB4

17OkuraA3

18Daikanyama T-SiteA3

Sights

◉TOP Museum

MUSEUM

Tokyo's principal photography museum usually holds three different exhibitions at once, drawing on both its extensive collection of Japanese artists and images on loan. Shows may include the history of photography, retrospectives of major artists or surveys of up-and-coming ones. The museum is at the far end of **Yebisu Garden Place**, on the right side of the complex if you're coming from Ebisu Station. There's a branch of the excellent art bookshop **Nadiff** here, too. (東京都写真美術館, Tokyo Photographic Arts Museum; www.topmuseum.jp)

Yebisu Garden Place | TANJALAGICA/GETTY IMAGES ©

◉Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum

MUSEUM

Although the Teien museum often hosts excellent exhibitions – usually of decorative arts – its chief appeal lies in the building itself: it's an art-deco structure and former princely estate, built in 1933 and designed by French architect Henri Rapin, with much of the original interior intact. A recent renovation saw the addition of a modern annex designed by artist Sugimoto Hiroshi. Tip: budget time to lounge around on the manicured lawn.

Note that the museum is closed between exhibitions and, at the time of research, was urging visitors to purchase timed tickets online in advance. (東京都庭園美術館; www.teien-art-museum.ne.jp)

Institute for Nature Study

PARK

What would Tokyo look like were it left to its own natural devices? Since 1949 this park, affiliated with the Tokyo National Museum, has let the local flora go wild. There are wonderful walks through its groves, around ponds and on boardwalks over marshes. No more than 300 people are allowed in at a time, which makes for an even more peaceful setting. (自然教育園, Shizen Kyōiku-en; www.ins.kahaku.go.jp)

Beer Museum Yebisu

MUSEUM

Photos, vintage bottles and posters document the rise of Yebisu, and beer in general, in Japan at this small museum located where the Yebisu brewery stood from the late 19th century until 1988. You can sample four kinds of Yebisu beer in the 'tasting salon'. It's behind the Mitsukoshi department store at Yebisu Garden Place. (エビスビール記念館; www.sapporobeer.jp/brewery/y_museum/)

Beer Museum Yebisu | JOINTSTAR/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Kyū Asakura House

HISTORIC BUILDING

This building is a rare example of early-20th-century villa archi-tecture, so hidden that many locals don't even know it exists. The home, built in 1919 for the family of a local statesman, includes several large *tatami* (reed mat) rooms, one Western-style drawing room (the fashion at the time) and a strolling garden with stone lanterns. (旧朝倉家住宅, Kyū Asakura-ke Jūtaku)

Eating

Tonki

TONKATSU

¥

Tonki is a Tokyo *tonkatsu* (crumbed pork cutlet) legend, deep-frying with an unchanged recipe for over 80 years. The seats at the long counter – where you can watch the perfectly choreo-graphed chefs – are the most coveted. There is usually a queue (no reservations accepted), but you can wait inside. There are tables upstairs for larger groups. (とんき; www.instagram.com/tonkatsu_tonki)

Kabi

GASTRONOMY

¥¥¥

The name, Kabi (Japanese for 'mould'), would be unfortunate if it weren't tapping into the current vogue for all foods fermented and funky. Foraging and pickling also have a long history in Japan, and Kabi takes it up a notch (or three). Sample dish: pickled mackerel on rice (sushi style) wrapped in *shiso* (perilla) leaf and dusted with kale powder. Reservations required. (http://kabi.tokyo)

Yakiniku Champion

BARBECUE

¥¥

Champion is one of Tokyo's best spots for *yakiniku* – literally 'grilled meat' and the Japanese term for Korean barbecue. The menu runs the gamut from sweetbreads to the choicest cuts of grade A5 *wagyū;* there's a diagram of the cuts as well as descriptions (in English). It's very popular; reservations recommended. (焼肉チャンピオン; www.yakiniku-champion.com)

Ippo

IZAKAYA

¥¥

This mellow little *izakaya* (Japanese pub-eatery) specialises in simple pleasures: fish and sake (there’s an English sign out front that says just that). The friendly chefs speak English and can help you decide what to have grilled, steamed, simmered or fried; if you can’t decide, the set menu is great value. The entrance is up the wooden stairs. (一歩; www.sakanabar-ippo.com)

Afuri

RAMEN

¥

Afuri has been a major player in the local ramen scene, making a strong case for a light touch with its signature *yuzu-shio* (a light, salty broth flavoured with *yuzu,* a type of citrus) ramen. It also does a vegan ramen. It’s since opened branches around the city, but this industrial-chic Ebisu shop is the original. (あふり; www.afuri.com;)

Ouca

ICE CREAM

¥

Green tea isn’t the only flavour Japan has contributed to the ice-cream playbook; other delicious innovations available (seasonally) at this famous Ebisu ice-cream stand include *kurogoma* (black sesame), *kinako kurosato* (roasted soybean flour and black sugar) and *beni imo* (purple sweet potato). (櫻花; www.ice-ouca.com;)

Ebisu Food Stalls

Locals love **Ebisu-yokochō** (恵比寿横町; map; www.ebisu-yokocho.com), a retro arcade chock-a-block with food stalls dishing up everything from humble *yaki soba* (fried buckwheat noodles) to decadent *hotate-yaki* (grilled scallops). Seating is on stools; some of the tables are made from repurposed beer crates. It’s loud and lively pretty much every night of the week; go early to get a table. Hours and prices vary by shop. The entrance is marked with a rainbow-coloured sign.

There’s now also a purpose built **Shibuya-yokochō** (www.shibuya-yokocho.com), part of the new Miyashita Park complex, that has outdoor seating and more space – so it’s easier to score a table – but has less of the original’s cachet and charm.

Drinking

🍷Gem by Moto

BAR

Gem specialises in boutique sakes collected from all over Japan. There’s a menu, which is always changing, but if you’re here to broaden your appreciation of *nihonshū* (and that’s why everyone is here), it’s best to leave the choosing to the savvy people behind the counter. Tell them what you like and don’t like; you’re in good hands. Come early or make a reservation. (ジェムバイモト; https://gembymoto.gorp.jp/)

🍷Another 8

BAR

Another 8 is part of a wave of cool new bars turning an eye not just to craft beer but to small-batch sake as well, with a changing line-up of eight of each. It’s in a renovated garage on a side street just south of Meguro-dōri. DJs spin here most Friday and Saturday evenings. (http://sakahachi.jp)

🍷Bar Trench

COCKTAIL BAR

One of the pioneers of Tokyo’s now flourishing cocktail scene, Trench (a suitable name for a bar hidden in a narrow alley) is a tiny place with an air of old-world bohemianism – but that might just be the absinthe talking. The always-changing original cocktails are made with botanical infusions and bitters.

If it’s full (and it often is), ask the staff to point you towards sister bar Tram, a block away. (バートレンチ; www.small-axe.net)

Entertainment

Unit

LIVE MUSIC

This subterranean club stages live music and DJ-hosted events (sometimes staggered on the same night). The solid line-up includes Japanese indie bands, veterans playing to a smaller crowd and overseas artists making their Japan debut. Unit has high ceilings and an intentionally industrial-cool interior (in addition to excellent sound), separating it from Tokyo’s grungier live-music spots. Ticket prices vary. (ユニット; www.unit-tokyo.com)

Shopping

Kapital

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Cult brand Kapital is hard to pin down, but perhaps a deconstructed mash-up of the American West and the centuries-old Japanese aesthetic of *boro* (tatty-chic) comes close. Almost no two items are alike, and the textiles (particularly the shawls and socks) are gorgeous. The shop itself is like an art installation, and the facade is always changing.

The staff, who are not snobby at all, can point you towards the other two shops nearby. (キャピタル; www.kapital.jp)

Okura

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Okura specialises in clothing and accessories dyed with indigo, which has a long tradition in Japan. There are contemporary T-shirts and hoodies and also items that riff on older silhouettes, like the trailing sleeves of a kimono. The natural fabrics are sturdy and/or sumptuous (unfortunately priced accordingly). Note: there's no sign out the front, but the two-storey, plaster-and-tile building is distinct. (オクラ; www.hrm.co.jp)

Daikanyama T-Site

BOOKS

Tokyo's most famous bookshop, spread out over three buildings (with a cool basket-weave facade designed by KDa), has a dazzling collection of books on travel, art, design and food, including many books in English on Japan and Japanese fiction in translation. Reading at the in-house Starbucks is a popular (and competitive – be quick on your feet for a seat!) local pastime.

There's another big branch in Ginza Six. (代官山T-SITE; http://real.tsite.jp/daikanyama/)

Shibuya

Shibuya, the heart of Tokyo's youth culture, hits you over the head with its sheer presence: the continuous flow of people, the glowing video screens and the tangible buzz. All of this is summed up by its top attraction, Shibuya Crossing. It's also a neighbourhood that is currently undergoing a massive transformation, evidenced by new developments like Shibuya Sky.

Shibuya Crossing | F11PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

The Short List

➡ *Shibuya Crossing Losing yourself in the crowds at Japan's iconic* *intersection.*

➡*Shibuya Sky Ascending to new heights over Shibuya's newest, tallest tower.*

➡*Shibuya Center-gai Wandering the neighbourhood's always-lively, neon-lit main drag.*

➡*Shimo-Kitazawa Exploring this long-time bastion of counter culture*

➡*Hands Finding everything you need and don't need at this famous miscellaneous store.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote line stops at Shibuya Station. The Keiō Inokashira line connects Shibuya and Shimo-Kitazawa.

S The Ginza, Hanzōmon and Fukutoshin lines stop in Shibuya.

🚌 Bus 1 departs from the east side of Shibuya Station for Shimbashi (near Ginza) via Roppongi.

🚶 Harajuku and Aoyama are near enough to reach on foot.

Top Experience

Join the Crowds at Shibuya Crossing

Rumoured to be the busiest intersection in the world (and definitely in Japan), Shibuya Crossing – also known as Shibuya Scramble – is like a giant beating heart, sending people in all directions with every pulsing light change. It is one of the most photographed spots in the city; if you've seen any film set in Tokyo, odds are it featured a shot of Shibuya Crossing. There's probably nowhere else that says 'Welcome to Tokyo' better than this.

いくぜ! 本気な住まい探し!
at home
カラオケ JOYSOUND
うたスキ JOYSOUND
Hisamitsu
サロンパス
MAX
KODA KUMI

ALESSANDRO CRUGNOLA/500PX ©

渋谷スクランブル交差点, Shibuya Scramble Crossing

S Ginza or Fukutoshin line to Shibuya, exit A8, 🚆 JR Yamanote line to Shibuya, Hachikō exit

☑

Top Tips

➡Shibuya Crossing is a busy intersection vehicle-wise, too, and the light gives you only enough time to dart across on foot, so be quick with your photos or head to a nearby view spot.

➡The intersection is most impressive after dark on a Friday or Saturday night, when the crowds pouring out of the station are at their thickest and neon-lit by the signs above. (Rainy days have their own visual appeal, with all the colourful umbrellas.) The rhythms here are, however, tied to the train station and after the last train pulls out for the night, the intersection becomes eerily quiet.

Take a Break

Walk over to land-mark department store Shibuya Parco, which has lots of refuelling options, including Delifucious and Jikasei Mensho.

The Crossing

This is the Tokyo you came to see: throbbing crowds, glowing lights and giant video screens beaming larger-than-life celebrities over the streets. Developers may have poured trillions of yen into sleek towers designed to project an idealised image of the city of the future, yet it is this somewhat haphazard intersection (built over the confluence of two underground, diverted rivers) that has somehow become shorthand for Tokyo in the global imagination.

Hundreds of people – and at peak times upwards of 3000 people – cross at a time, coming from all directions at once yet still managing to dodge each other with a practised nonchalance. Then, in the time that it takes for the light to go from red to green again, all corners have replenished their stock of people – like a video on loop. All told, it’s been estimated that on busy days, some 500,000 use the crossing – as many as some of Tokyo's busiest train stations.

And it's not just a tourist attraction: in the past decade, Shibuya Crossing has become the go-to spot to celebrate New Year's Eve, Halloween or a World Cup victory (local police, however, are not pleased with this development).

Where to Go for the Best Views

Mag's Park (https://magnetbyshibuya109.jp/en/mags-park), the rooftop of the Magnet by Shibuya 109 shopping centre, has the best views over the crossing. It's screened with plexiglass, so you can get photos without having to worry about dropping your phone over the edge. At the time of research the price of admission was one drink.

There's also a decent view of the crossing from a 2nd-floor passage inside Shibuya's train station, across from the mural Myth of Tomorrow. The Starbucks on the 2nd floor of the Q-front building across the street is another good vantage point (though it's hard to get a seat).

Walking Tour

Hang Out in Shimo-Kitazawa

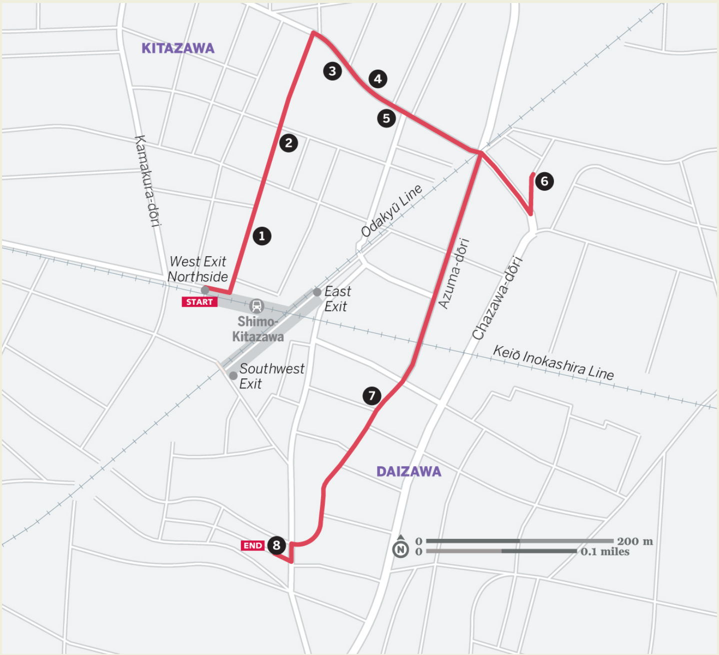
For decades Shimokita (as it's called here) has been a prism through which to see the city's alternative side. While other neighbourhoods go big, Shimokita has fiercely defended its small stature, narrow, crooked roads (the bane of taxi drivers) and arty, analogue vibe. Though it lost the battle over the massive train station renovation, there is still plenty of authentic, eccentric Shimokita to explore.

Walk Facts

Start Shimo-Kitazawa Station, West Exit Northside

End Mother

Length 1km, one to two hours


KITAZAWA
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Chazawa-dōri
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❶

Shimokita Garage Department

First stop: **Shimokita Garage Department**, a permanent flea market inside a warehouse-like space with a can't-miss-it mural out front (and a Shimokita icon). None of these shops open before noon so don't even bother trying to get an early start.

❷

B-Side Label

B-Side Label is a collective of independent sticker artists who turn out a vast array of styles – from super cute to downright irreverent – but all high quality. Excellent souvenirs, obviously.

❸

Bear Pond Espresso

Need caffeine? Give Tokyo's most divisive coffee shop, **Bear Pond Espresso**, a try. We love the cold, layered Dirty (or the holy grail 'angel stain' espresso if they feel like serving it); others can't deal with the sometimes surly service.

❹

New York Joe Exchange

It's a tough call, but **New York Joe Exchange** is probably our favourite Shimokita secondhand store. It's a recycle shop – so everything here is someone's personal castaway (but like a really stylish person's castaway). Bonus: it's in an old bathhouse, with tiled floor intact. There are tonnes of vintage stores in this area north of Shimo-Kitazawa Station, so detours are encouraged!

❺

Ichiban-gai Shutter Art

Ichiban-gai is locally famous for its **shutter art** – murals painted on shopfront shutters. One that you can see throughout the day (usually) is an untitled, vaguely psychedelic rendition of a magician-like character by MOT8, who has since done murals all over the city.

❻

The Suzunari

Shimokita is the locus of Tokyo’s fringe theatre scene. It’s all but inaccessible without Japanese fluency, but anyone can appreci-ate **The Suzunari**, an absolute shambles of a building that houses a theatre and several small bars. Come back in the evening to visit **Ghetto**, our favourite bar here.

❼

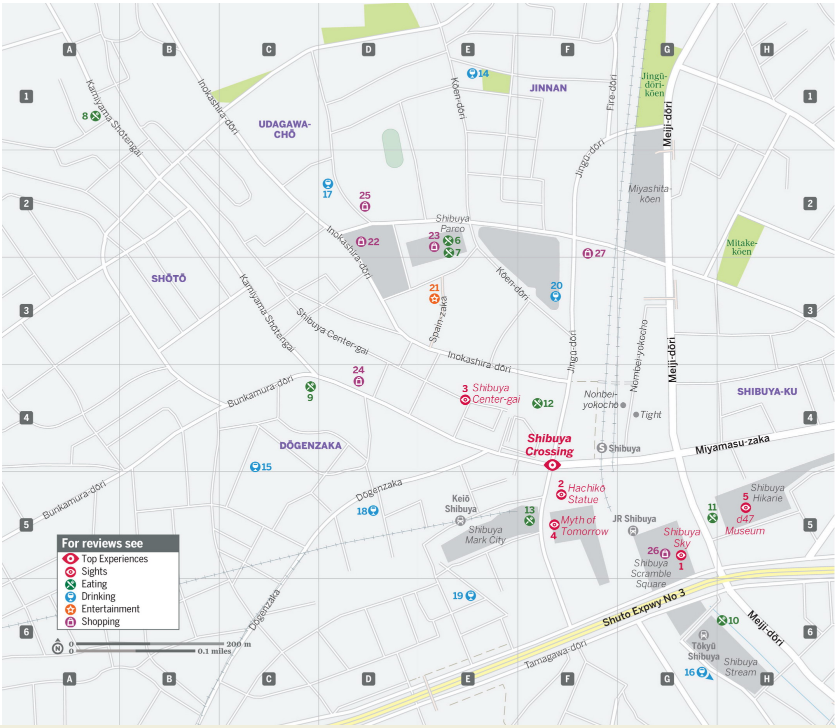
Flash Disc Ranch

The very retro-looking **Azuma-dōri** will take you to Shimokita’s south side and independent secondhand record store **Flash Disc Ranch** – a must-visit for crate diggers. It’s also just cool to see: wacky art at the entrance and celebrity scribbles on the staircase. Closed Wednesdays.

❽

Mother

Assuming it’s 5pm by now, head into the undulating, womb-like interior of classic Shimokita hangout, **Mother**. It’s got a soundtrack from the ’60s and ’70s and trippy mosaic artwork inside and out.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SHŌTŌ
DŌGENZAKA
SHIBUYA-KU
Jingū-dōri-kōen
Miyashita-kōen
Mitake-kōen
Meiji-dōri
Kamiyama Shotengai
Inokashira-dōri
Kōen-dōri
Fire-dōri
Jingū-dōri
Shibuya Parco
Spain-zaka
Shibuya Center-gai
Bunkamura-dōri
Nombei-yokocho
Nonbei-yokochō
Tight
Shibuya
Miyamasu-zaka
Shibuya Crossing
3 Shibuya Center-gai
2 Hachikō Statue
4 Myth of Tomorrow
JR Shibuya
Keiō Shibuya
Shibuya Mark City
Shibuya Sky 1
Shibuya Scramble Square
Shibuya Hikarie
5 d47 Museum
Dōgenzaka
Shuto Expwy No 3
Tamagawa-dōri
Tōkyū Shibuya
Shibuya Stream
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For reviews see
Top Experiences
Sights
Eating
Drinking
Entertainment
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Top Experiences

Shibuya CrossingF4

Sights

1Shibuya SkyG5

2Hachikō StatueF5

3Shibuya Center-gaiE4

4Myth of TomorrowF5

5d47 MuseumH5

Eating

6DelifuciousE2

7Jikasei MenshoE2

8PignonA1

9SagataniC4

10Maru BengaraH6

11d47 ShokudōG5

12Katsu MidoriF4

13Food ShowF5

Drinking

14SG ClubE1

15Mikkeller TokyoC4

16Circus TokyoG6

17Rhythm CafeD2

18ContactD5

19OathE6

20Karaoke RainbowF3

Entertainment

21WWWE3

Shopping

22HandsD2

23Shibuya ParcoE2

24Mega DonkiD4

25Gen Gen AnD2

26Shibuya Scramble SquareG5

27Tower RecordsF2

Sights

Shibuya Sky

OBSERVATORY

From below, Shibuya Sky, the rooftop observatory atop Shibuya's newest tower, Shibuya Scramble Square, looks like one of those harrowing infinity pools – people leaning over the edge of nothingness. Rest assured, it has plenty of safeguards, but the open-air, 360-degree views from 229m (the tallest in Shibuya) are still awesome. The entrance (and lift to the top) is on the 14th floor. To avoid queues (and save a few hundred yen) purchase timed-entry tickets online in advance.

Note that there is some strobe-effect lighting once your enter; see the website for other admission precautions. There's also an indoor observatory on the 46th floor (open even when the roof is closed for bad weather). (www.shibuya-scramble-square.com/sky)

Hachikō Statue

STATUE

Every evening, Akita dog Hachikō would go to Shibuya Station to greet his companion, a university professor. It's a practice he kept up every day for 10 years after the professor's death, and until his own. This small bronze statue in front of Shibuya Station was put up in honour of the dog's unwavering loyalty. It's a well-known landmark and the surrounding plaza (outside the eponymous Hachikō exit) is Shibuya's de facto rendezvous point – and always full of people. (ハチ公像)

Hachikō statue by Takeshi Ando | JOOFOTIA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Shibuya Center-gai

STREET

Shibuya's main drag is closed to cars and chock-a-block with fast-food joints and high-street fashion shops. At night, lit as bright as day, with a dozen competing soundtracks (coming from who knows where), wares spilling onto the streets and strutting teens, it feels like a block party – or Tokyo's version of a classic Asian night market. (渋谷センター街, Shibuya Sentā-gai)

◉ Myth of Tomorrow

PUBLIC ART

Okamoto Tarō's mural, *Myth of Tomorrow* (1967), was commissioned by a Mexican luxury hotel but went missing two years later. It finally turned up in 2003 and, in 2008, the haunting 30m-long work, which depicts the atomic bomb exploding over Hiroshima, was installed inside Shibuya Station. It's on the 2nd-floor corridor leading to the Inokashira line ticket gates. (明日の神話, Asu no Shinwa)

◉ d47 Museum

MUSEUM

Lifestyle brand D&Department combs the country for the platonic ideals of the utterly ordinary: the perfect broom, bottle opener or salt shaker (to name a few examples). See rotating exhibitions of its latest finds from all 47 prefectures at this one-room museum. Select finds, meanwhile, can be purchased at the **d47 design travel store** next door.

The museum and shop are on the 8th floor of Shibuya Hikarie; restaurant d47 Shokudō is here, too. (www.hikarie8.com/d47museum)

Eating

Delifucious

BURGERS

¥

What happens when a former Ginza sushi chef turns his attention to – of all things – American-style fast food? You get fish burgers and *anago* (seafaring eel) hot dogs prepared with the same attention to ingredients, preparation and presentation that you'd expect from a high-end sushi counter (but at a far more acceptable price). It's in the basement of Shibuya Parco. (www.delifucious.com)

Jikasei Mensho

RAMEN
¥

The latest outpost from experi-mental ramen franchise Mensho, in the basement of Shibuya Parco, has really good vegan *tantanmen* (Sichuan-style spicy noodles); the broth is thickened with sesame paste (instead of collagen from animal bones) and spiced with *sanshō* (Japanese pepper). There's another style with a lighter broth topped with *wagyū* (Japanese beef). Order from the tablet at your seat. (https://menya-shono.com;🥕)

Pignon

BISTRO
¥¥¥

Chef Yoshikawa Rimpei's popular bistro serves French food with some Moroccan flavours (everyone orders the housemade, charcoal-grilled *merguez* with harissa) – and really any other flavours he's picked up on his extensive travels. The vibe is cool and oddly placeless: not Tokyo but not Paris either. Reservations recommended, but go early in the week and you can probably get a seat. (ピニョン; www.pignontokyo.jp)

Sagatani

SOBA
¥

Proving that Tokyo is only expensive for those who don’t know better, this all-night joint serves bamboo steamers of delicious noodles for ¥380. You won’t regret ‘splurging’ on the *goma-dare soba* (ごまだれそば; buckwheat noodles with sesame dipping sauce) for ¥480. Look for the stone mill in the win-dow and order from the vending machine. (嵯峨谷; https://foryou-group.co.jp/brandfc/kantou/entry-72.html)

Maru Bengara

JAPANESE
¥¥

Maru is a meal made easy: at lunch the restaurant does good grilled fish *teishoku* (set meals) and in the evenings, menus with sashimi, seasonal sides, a main of meat or fish and a choice of Japanese-style desserts. If you want something lighter, you can also order small dishes (like grilled mushrooms or honeyed walnuts) designed to go with sake. It’s in the Shibuya Stream complex, with direct subway access. (圓 弁柄; www.maru-mayfont.jp)

d47 Shokudō

JAPANESE
¥

There are 47 prefectures in Japan and d47 serves a changing line-up of *teishoku* (set meals) that evoke the specialities of each, from the fermented tofu of Okinawa to the stuffed squid of Hokkaidō. A larger menu of small plates is available in the evening; tea and coffee is served in the afternoon hours. It’s on the 8th floor of Shibuya Hikarie. (d47食堂; www.hikarie8.com)

Katsu Midori

SUSHI

¥¥

This *kaiten-zushi* (conveyor-belt sushi restaurant) is known to be far better than average, so there's nearly always a queue. Go at non-typical meal times. The menu is huge, including lots of non-seafood items. It's on the 8th floor of Seibu department store (Bldg A). (活美登利; www.katumidori.co.jp; 👪)

Food Show

SUPERMARKET

¥

A best friend to harried and hungry commuters, Food Show has fresh dumplings, sushi sets, sandwiches and heaps of salads from which to choose, all packaged to go. There are also pretty cakes and gelato by the scoop. It's in the basement of Shibuya Station (and a bit of a maze); look for the green signs near Hachikō and in the station pointing downstairs. (フードショー; www.tokyu-dept.co.jp/shibuya_foodshow; 🥕)

Drinking

SG Club

COCKTAIL BAR

SG stands for 'Sip' and 'Guzzle', but also for award-winning bartender Shingo Gokan. Ground-floor Guzzle is a social, counter space; the house drink is *chawari* – *shōchū* and tea, made with *gyokuro* (high-grade green tea). Downstairs, Sip is intimate booths and deliciously complex concoctions, like the Rain & Moss Gin Fizz, flavoured with proprietary extractions and infusions. Reservations recom-mended. (www.instagram.com/the_sg_club/)

Mikkeller Tokyo

CRAFT BEER

Mikkel Borg Bjergsø is a pioneer ‘gypsy brewer’, one who dreams up wild concoctions but outsources the actual brewing. His beers are served at world-famous restaurants and also at the select bars scattered across the globe that bear his name, including this one in Tokyo. Most of the 20 brews on tap are his, but there are also some Japanese craft beers, too.

The bar is a little hard to find, located deep within the red-light areas of Dōgenzaka, but in an oddly cheerful sunny yellow building (with cool Scandi-decor inside). (https://mikkeller.jp)

Circus Tokyo

CLUB

Circus, the Tokyo offshoot of an Osaka club, is aggressively underground: small, out of the way, in a basement (of course), with no decor to speak of and all attention laser-focused on the often experimental music. It’s open most Fridays and Saturdays from 11pm, and sometimes other nights; check the schedule online. ID required. Wear your comfy shoes because there’s nowhere to sit. (www.circus-tokyo.jp)

Rhythm Cafe

BAR

Rhythm Cafe is a fun little DJ bar secreted among the winding streets of Shibuya sub-district Udagawa-chō (known for its record shops). It’s run by a record label and known for having offbeat event nights (like the one featuring retro Japanese pop). Drinks are cheap; some events have a cover, but not usually more than ¥1000. (リズムカフェ; www.instagram.com/rhythmcafe_shibuya/; 📶)

Contact

CLUB

Several storeys under a parking garage, Contact is currently one of Tokyo’s hottest clubs, and some big names play here. It’s as much a place to see and be seen as it is to dance. Come after 1am on a Friday or Saturday night to see it in top form. To enter, you need to sign up for a membership through the website; ID required. (コンタクト; www.contacttokyo.com)

Oath

BAR

Oath is a tiny space covered in gilt and mirrors, dripping with chandeliers and absolutely not taking itself seriously. It’s a very popular spot for pre-partying and after-partying, thanks to cheap drinks, fun DJs and late hours. Cover charge is ¥1000 (one drink included; ¥1500 after 11pm on Friday and Saturday). Closed irregularly. (www.djbar-oath.com)

Karaoke Rainbow

KARAOKE

This is Shibuya’s most popular karaoke spot for two reasons: it doesn’t have the same dated look as the generic chains, and you get the first hour free on weekdays (though, technically, you need to buy one drink). Staff speak some English and the English song list is extensive. It’s on the 8th floor of the building with the Marui department store. (www.karaoke-rainbow.com)

Drunkard’s Alley

Nonbei-yokochō (のんべえ横丁; map; www.nonbei.tokyo) – literally ‘Drunkard’s Alley’ – is one of Tokyo’s anomalous strips of tiny wooden shanty bars in the shadow of the elevated JR tracks. Note that some of the bars have cover charges (usually ¥500 to ¥1000).

Tight (タイト; map) is one that doesn’t. Like the name suggests, it’s a tight fit, but the lack of seats doesn’t keep regulars away: on a busy night, they line the stairs. Look for the big picture window.

Entertainment

WWW

LIVE MUSIC

In a former art-house cinema with the tell-tale tiered floor (but not the seats) still intact, this is one of those rare Tokyo venues where you could turn up just about any night and hear something good. The line-up (of mostly local acts) varies from indie pop to hip-hop to electronica. (https://www-shibuya.jp)

Shopping

Hands

CONCEPT STORE

This DIY and *zakka* (miscellaneous things) store is a Tokyo landmark, loved by locals and tourists alike. It has eight fascinating floors of everything you didn’t know you needed – reflexology slippers, bee-venom face masks and cartoon-character-shaped rice-ball moulds, for example. Most stuff is inexpensive, making it perfect for souvenir and gift hunting. Warning: you could lose hours in here.

There’s another branch in **Shin-juku** (東急ハンズ新宿店), inside Takashima Times Square, that is usually less crowded and easier to navigate (but is less iconic than the Shibuya store). (東急ハンズ; http://

shibuya.tokyu-hands.co.jp)

Shibuya Parco

DEPARTMENT STORE

Shibuya Parco has been a trend-setter for decades and now, after a renovation finished in 2019, it is back in top form. There are global brands but also Japanese ones, both internationally known (Comme des Garçons etc) and less so (like Toga and Anrealage). You could pound the pavement in search of fashionable boutiques, or just come here. (渋谷パルコ; https://shibuya.parco.jp; 📶)

Mega Donki

VARIETY

You could show up in Tokyo completely empty-handed and this huge outpost of all-night, bargain retailer ‘Don Quijote’ would have you covered. There are groceries, toiletries, electronics and clothes – along with all sorts of random stuff, including the best selection of unusual-flavoured Kit-Kat chocolates we’ve seen in Japan.

There are Donkis in most hub neighbourhoods, including a very chaotic one on Yasukini-dōri in Shinjuku. (MEGA ドンキ; www.donki.com)

Gen Gen An幻

TEA

Gen Gen An幻 is a contemporary take on a classic tea shop, with walls of wooden drawers holding dozens of varieties of *ryokucha* (high-grade green tea), *hōjicha* (roasted tea) and more from small organic producers in Kyūshū’s Saga prefecture. Sample sets make great gifts. A limited number of teas can also be ordered to take away (in biodegradable cups). (幻幻庵; https://en-tea.com)

🛍 Shibuya Scramble Square

MALL

Shibuya's newest mall has eight floors of fashion, beauty and lifestyle boutiques (and more floors for restaurants, cafes and gourmet food shops). There's a little bit of everything: international and Japanese brands, high-end designer goods and solid staples.

Shibuya Sky is on the top, so odds are you'll be visiting anyway. (www.shibuya-scramble-square.com; 📶)

🛍 Tower Records

MUSIC

Tower lives – in Japan at least! This eight-storey temple of music has a deep collection of Japanese and world music. Even if you're not into buying, it is a great place to browse and discover local artists. There are lots of listening stations on the ground floor. (タワーレコード; http://tower.jp/store/Shibuya)

Harajuku & Aoyama

Harajuku is one of Tokyo's biggest draws thanks to its grand shrine, Meiji-jingū. It's also a world-renowned shopping destination, where the chic (and chic in training) come to browse and be seen. Many boutiques here have been designed by influential architects – another draw. Neighbouring Aoyama, meanwhile, is a shopping and dining district for the city's fashionable elite.

TAX FREE
The SH
TO
Condomania

Tokyu Plaza | JIRAT TEPARAKSA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©; ARCHITECT: HIROSHI NAKAMURA

The Short List

➡*Meiji-jingū Following the wooded path to Tokyo's most impressive*

Shintō shrine (and a whole other world within the city).

➡*Omote-sandō Taking in contemporary architecture and eyebrow-raising consumerism along this wide, boutique-lined boulevard.*

➡*Yoyogi-kōen Wandering the city's most popular park, which buzzes with life on weekends.*

➡*Ukiyo-e Ōta Memorial Museum of Art Admiring woodblock prints from old masters.*

➡*Farmer's Market @UNU Exploring a market that's as much a social event as a shopping stop.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote line stops at Harajuku Station.

S The Chiyoda and Fukutoshin lines stop at Meiji-jingūmae (for Harajuku); the Chiyoda, Ginza and Hanzōmon lines stop at Omote-sandō (for Aoyama).

🚶 The boulevard Omote-sandō connects Harajuku and Aoyama; Shibuya is also within walking distance.

Top Experience

Leave the City Behind at Meiji-jingū

Meiji-jingū (Meiji Shrine) is Tokyo's signature Shintō shrine. It's a major tourist attraction but one that locals appreciate, too: the shrine is set in a 70 hectare forest (with some 120,000 trees donated from all over Japan). It feels transported from a fairy tale, even though it's right in the thick of the city. A shrine visit is also a great way to participate in Japanese culture.

KENSOFTTH/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

明治神宮

www.meijijingu.or.jp

admission free

🕒dawn-dusk

S Chiyoda or Fukutoshin line to Meiji-jingūmae, exit 2, 🚆 JR Yamanote line to Harajuku, Omote-sandō exit

Top Tips

➡Meiji-jingū is open from dawn until dusk – and the latter can happen earlier than you might think in Tokyo (especially in the winter). Don't head over too late in the day; in fact, the earlier the better – the shrine is at its most peaceful in the early-morning hours.

➡Don't miss the strolling garden **Meiji-jingū Gyoen**. Here there are peaceful walks, a good dose of privacy on weekdays, and spectacular irises in June. The entrance is halfway along the gravel path to the shrine; admission is ¥500.

Take a Break

Mori no Terrace (杜のテラス), right on the gravel path leading into the shrine grounds, serves coffee, tea and ice cream.

Pass Through the Gates

The shrine is at the end of a long (700m) gravel path (there's a paved strip on the edge for prams and wheelchair users). Along the way, you'll pass under three towering, wooden *torii* (shrine gates); some have recently been redone, as part of restoration work carried out in 2020 for the shrine's centenary. In Shintō, these gates mark the boundary between the mundane and spiritual worlds, which is why you'll see locals bowing before passing through them.

Purify Yourself at the Font

Before the final *torii* is the *temizu-ya* (font), where it is customary to purify yourself (purity is an important tenet of Shintō). Usually this is done with ladles in a sort of complex ritual; but during the pandemic the ladles were swapped out for bamboo spouts, under which you run your hands (but perhaps the ladles are back by the time you read this?).

Make an Offering (If You Like)

In front of the main shrine building, with its cypress beams and copper-plated roof, there’s a box for offerings. To make one (along with a wish), toss a coin into the box – some people believe a ¥5 coin is lucky – bow twice, clap your hands twice and then bow again. (Note that you can’t take photos here, or anywhere where there is a roof over your head.)

Votive Tablets & Amulets

With your back now to the main shrine, on your left (under one of the two 100-year-old camphor trees) you will see racks of *ema* (votive tablets), on which shrine visitors can record their hopes and prayers for the gods (*kami*, in Japanese) to see. You can, too; the cost is a ¥500 donation. There are also kiosks, to the left of the main shrine plaza, that sell various *omamori* (amulets) – for everything from passing an exam to safe childbirth. Our personal favourite is the charm for safe travel, naturally.

Walking Tour

Omote-sandō Architecture

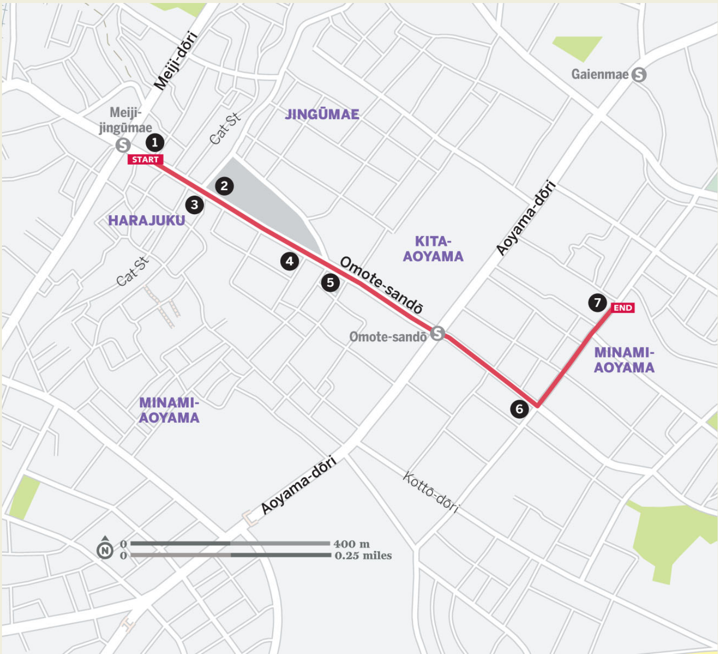
Omote-sandō (表参道), the broad, tree-lined boulevard that connects Harajuku and Aoyama, was originally designed as the official approach to Meiji-jingū. Today it's better known for its upmarket boutiques – designed by the who's who of (mostly) Japanese contemporary architects. There's no better (or more convenient) place to gain an overview of Japan's current sense of design.

Walk Facts

Start Tokyu Plaza

End SunnyHills

Length 1.2km; one hour


Meiji-dōri
Cat St
JINGŪMAE
Gaienmae
Meiji-jingūmae
1
START
2
3
HARAJUKU
Cat St
4
5
Omote-sandō
KITA-AOYAMA
Aoyama-dōri
7
END
Omote-sandō
MINAMI-AOYAMA
6
MINAMI-AOYAMA
Aoyama-dōri
Kottō-dōri
N
0
0
400 m
0.25 miles

❶

Tokyu Plaza

At the intersection of Omote-sandō and Meiji-dōri stands **Tokyu Plaza**, a castle-like structure built in 2012 and designed by up-and-coming architect Hiroshi Nakamura. The entrance is a dizzying hall of mirrors and there’s a roof garden (with a Starbucks) on top.

❷

Omotesandō Hills

Tadao Ando’s **Omotesandō Hills** (2003) is a high-end shopping mall that spirals around a sunken central atrium. Ando’s architecture utilises materials such as concrete to create strong geometric shapes, often drawn from traditional Japanese architecture.

❸

Dior Building

Across the street, the five-storey glass **Dior Building** (2003), designed by SANAA (Nishizawa Ryue and Sejima Kazuyo), has a filmy surface that seems to hang like a dress (an effect achieved with clever lighting and acrylic screens).

❹

Louis Vuitton Building

A couple of blocks down, Aoki Jun’s **Louis Vuitton Building** (2002) has offset panels of tinted glass behind sheets of metal mesh that are meant to evoke a stack of trunks. There’s a free art gallery, **Espace Louis Vuitton Tokyo**, on the 7th floor.

❺

Tod’s Building

Climb onto the elevated pedestrian crossing to better admire Itō Tōyō’s construction for **Tod’s** (2004). The criss-crossing strips of concrete take their inspiration from the zelkova trees below; they’re also structural.

❻

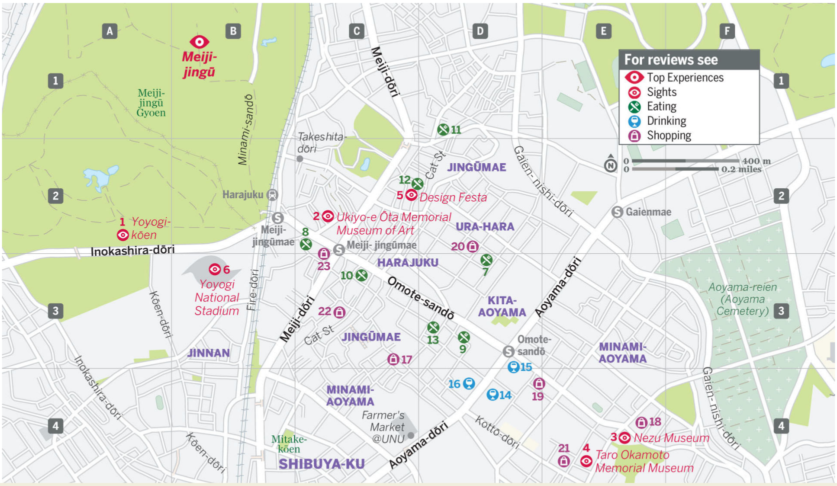
Prada Aoyama Building

You can’t miss the **Prada Aoyama Building** (2003) with its curvaceous exterior of convex glass bubbles. Created by Herzog & de Meuron, this is the building that escalated the design race throughout the neighbourhood.

❼

SunnyHills

Turn the corner to see Kengo Kuma’s design for Taiwanese pineapple cake shop **SunnyHills** (2014). Kuma is an architect known for his use of wood and traditional Japanese joinery techniques, and this building represents his work at its most playful. The 3D-modelled latticework is supposed to evoke a bamboo basket, but also resembles a cross-hatched pineapple. Kuma also did the redesign for the nearby Nezu Museum.


A
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Meiji-jingū
Meiji-jingū Gyoen
Minami-sandō
Meiji-dōri
Takeshita-dōri
Harajuku
11
Cat St
JINGŪMAE
12
5 Design Festa
Gaien-nishi-dōri
Gaienmae
N
0 400 m
0 0.2 miles
1 Yoyogi-kōen
2 Ukiyo-e Ōta Memorial Museum of Art
Meiji-jingūmae
8
Meiji- jingūmae
URA-HARA
Inokashira-dōri
23
20
7
6 Yoyogi National Stadium
10
HARAJUKU
Omote-sandō
Aoyama-dōri
Aoyama-reien (Aoyama Cemetery)
Kōen-dōri
Fire-dōri
Meiji-dōri
22
KITA-AOYAMA
Cat St
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MINAMI-AOYAMA
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4 Taro Okamoto Memorial Museum
SHIBUYA-KU

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1Yoyogi-kōenA2

2Ukiyo-e Ōta Memorial Museum of ArtC2

3Nezu MuseumE4

4Taro Okamoto Memorial MuseumE4

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6Yoyogi National StadiumB3

Eating

7MaisenD3

8EatripC2

9Sahsya KanetanakaD3

10Harajuku Gyōza-rōC3

11Mominoki HouseD1

12Sakura-teiC2

13Brown Rice by Neal's Yard RemediesD3

Drinking

14Sakurai Japanese Tea ExperienceD4

15Aoyama Flower Market TeahouseD3

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Shopping

17House @Mikiri HassinC3

18A&S AoyamaE4

19Comme des GarçonsD4

20Koffee MameyaD2

KiddyLand(see 10)

21Sou-SouE4

22RagTagC3

23Chicago Thrift StoreC3

Sights

Yoyogi-kōen

PARK

If it’s a sunny and warm weekend afternoon, you can count on there being a crowd lazing around the large grassy expanse that is Yoyogi-kōen, Tokyo’s most popular public park. You’ll usually find revellers and noisemakers of all stripes, from hula-hoopers to African drum circles to retro greasers dancing around a boom box. It’s an excellent place for a picnic and probably the only place in the city where you can reasonably toss a Frisbee without fear of hitting someone. (代々木公園; www.yoyogipark.info)

Yoyogi-kōen | LOTTIE DAVIES/LONELY PLANET ©

Ukiyo-e Ōta Memorial Museum of Art

MUSEUM

The best place in Tokyo to see *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints). Each month, this small museum (where you swap your shoes for slippers) presents a seasonal, thematic exhibition (with English curation notes), drawing from the truly impressive collection of Ōta Seizo, the former head of the Toho Life Insurance Company. Most exhibitions include a few works by masters such as Hokusai and Hiroshige. The museum closes the last few days of the month (between exhibitions). (浮世絵太田記念美術館; www.ukiyoe-ota-muse.jp)

Nezu Museum

MUSEUM

Nezu Museum offers a striking blend of old and new: a renowned collection of Japanese, Chinese and Korean antiquities in a gallery space designed by contemporary architect Kengo Kuma. Selected items from the extensive collection are displayed in seasonal exhibitions with good English explanations. Behind the galleries is a woodsy strolling garden with a glass-walled cafe (also designed by Kuma). Timed entry tickets were required to be purchased online at the time of writing. (根津美術館; www.nezu-muse.or.jp)

Taro Okamoto Memorial Museum

MUSEUM

Painter and sculptor Okamoto Tarō was among the most prominent artists in Japan during the post-WWII period, a rare avant-garde figure with mass appeal. His works are at once playful and sinister, life-affirming and chaotic. This small museum, which includes a sculpture garden, is inside the artist's Aoyama home. (岡本太郎記念館; http://taro-okamoto.or.jp)

Design Festa

GALLERY

Design Festa has long been a champion of Tokyo’s DIY art scene and its maze-like building is a Harajuku landmark. (The building is a work of art in its own right, and is always changing.) Inside there are dozens of small galleries rented by the day. More often than not, the artists themselves are hanging around, too. Okonomiyaki restaurant Sakura-tei is here, too. (デザインフェスタ; www.designfestagallery.com)

Yoyogi National Stadium

ARCHITECTURE

This early masterpiece by architect Kenzō Tange was built for the 1964 Olympics (and was used again in the 2021 games for the handball event). The stadium, which looks vaguely like a samurai helmet, uses suspension-bridge technology – rather than beams – to support the roof. (国立代々木競技場, Kokuritsu Yoyogi Kyōgi-jō)

Eating

Maisen

TONKATSU

¥

Maisen is famous both for its *ton-katsu* (breaded, deep-fried pork cutlets) and its setting (an old public bathhouse). There are different grades of pork on the menu, including prized *kurobuta* (black pig), but even the cheapest is melt-in-your-mouth divine. The very reasonable lunch set is served until 4pm, while a takeaway window (10am to 6pm) serves delicious *tonkatsu sando* (sand-wiches). (まい泉; www.mai-sen.com👪)

Eatrip

BISTRO

¥¥¥

Eatrip, from food director and chef Yuri Nomura, is a landmark restaurant in Tokyo's farm-to-table organic movement. There's only one set menu, which changes daily. Food is contemporary Japanese with international inflections. Sample dish: *mahata* (grouper) sautéed with harissa (made in-house), squid ink and *daikon* (radish). See Eatrip's instagram for the latest info; reservations essential. (www.restaurant-eatrip.com)

Sahsya Kanetanaka

JAPANESE

¥¥

Sahsya Kanetanaka is the entry-level offshoot of exclusive *kaiseki* (haute cuisine) restaurant Kanetanaka. Lunch (served until 2pm) is a good deal: choose two mains (maybe thin sliced Japanese beef or sea bream) to go with small plates of seasonal vegetables. Walk-ins welcome for lunch; reservations essential for dinner. Enter through the garden designed by contemporary artist Hiroshi Sugimoto. (茶酒金田中; www.kanetanaka.co.jp/restaurant/sahsya/)

Harajuku Gyōza-rō

DUMPLINGS

¥

Gyōza (dumplings) are the only thing on the menu, but you won't hear any complaints from the regulars who queue to get their fix. Have them *sui* (boiled) or *yaki* (pan-fried), with or without *niniku* (garlic) or *nira* (chives) – they're all delicious. Expect to wait at weekends or at lunchtime, but the line moves quickly. (原宿餃子楼; www.harajukugyozaro.com)

Mominoki House

JAPANESE

¥¥

This pioneering macrobiotic restaurant has been running since 1976, long enough to see many a Harajuku trend come and go (and to see some famous visitors, like Sir Paul McCartney). Chef Yamada's menu is heavily vegan, but also includes free-range chicken and *Ezo shika* (Hokkaidō venison). Inside, the restaurant looks like a grown-up tree fort and features several cosy, semi-private booths. (もみの木ハウス; www.mominoki-house.net; 🥕)

Sakura-tei

OKONOMIYAKI

¥

Grill your own *okonomiyaki* (savoury pancakes) at this funky place inside the gallery Design Festa. In addition to classic options (with pork, squid and cabbage), there are some fun fusion-style ones as well as vegetarian options. There's also a great-value all-you-can-eat lunch plan: ¥1600 for 90 minutes (served 11am to 3pm), one drink order included. (さくら亭; www.sakuratei.co.jp; 📶 🥕)

Brown Rice by Neal's Yard Remedies

VEGAN

¥

Yes, this is Neal's Yard Remedies, as in the British health and beauty company, but for some reason they decided to open a restaurant, just one, here in Tokyo, and it's really good. The *teishoku* (meal sets) served all day, include brown rice (obviously) and sides of steamed and simmered organic, seasonal vegetables. Also brown-rice-based herbal teas. (www.nealsyard.co.jp/brownrice/welcome; 📶 🥕)

Drinking

Sakurai Japanese Tea Experience

TEAHOUSE

Tea master (and former bartender) Sakurai Shinya's contemporary teahouse is a must-visit for anyone hoping to deepen their understanding of *o-cha* (Japan-ese tea). The tea course (from ¥4800) includes several varieties paired with small bites, including some beautiful traditional sweets; you can order tea à la carte, too. Reservations recommended. Purchase loose tea and beautiful teapots and cups at the attached shop. (櫻井焙茶研究所; www.sakurai-tea.jp)

Aoyama Flower Market Teahouse

TEAHOUSE

Secreted in the back of a flower shop is this fairy-tale teahouse with flower beds running under the glass-top tables and more overhead, plus cut blooms in vases on every available surface. Tea comes by the pot and there are pretty sweets and salad spreads on the menu, too. Reservations aren't accepted so you may have to queue. (www.afm-teahouse.com)

Two Rooms

BAR

Expect a crowd dressed like they don't care that wine by the glass starts at ¥1600. The wine is good (and the bottle list deep), but, more importantly, the terrace has sweeping views towards the Shinjuku skyline. Call ahead (staff speak English) on Friday or Saturday night to reserve a spot under the stars. (トゥールームス; www.tworooms.jp)

Weekend Festivals & Markets

Both Harajuku and Aoyama are popular weekend destinations. There are events most Saturdays and Sundays throughout the year (and especially during the warmer months, between April and November) in the big open plaza across the street from Yoyogi-kōen. Most popular are the festivals sponsored by local communities, such at the annual Brazil Festival; flea markets happen here sometimes, too. Whatever's on, there will be *yatai* (food stalls).

Meanwhile, the plaza in front of the UN University in Aoyama plays host to Tokyo's best weekend **farmer's market** (map; www.farmersmarkets.jp), from 10am to 4pm. There are usually several food trucks, along with picnic tables for eating, as well as side events, including regular coffee, wine and sake festivals. Check the website for info on these and other events.

Shopping

House @Mikiri Hassin

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Hidden in the side alleys of Harajuku, House stocks an ever-changing selection of cool clothes and experimental Japanese fashion brands. The sales assistants are helpful and friendly – grateful, perhaps, that you made the effort to find the place. Look for 'ハウス' spelled vertically in neon. It doesn't open until 3pm on weekdays. (ハウス@ミキリハッシン; www.instagram.com/housemikirihassin)

A&S Aoyama

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

This is the flagship boutique from celebrity stylist Sonya Park, whose signature look is a vintage-inspired minimalism in luxurious, natural fabrics. It carries items both from her brand, Arts & Science, and also select international brands. Park has more small stores in a nearby mid-century apartment building called Palace Aoyama, across from the Nezu Museum. (www.arts-science.com)

Comme des Garçons

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Designer Kawakubo Rei threw a wrench in the fashion machine in the early ’80s with her dark, asymmetrical designs. That her work doesn’t appear as shocking today speaks volumes about her success. This eccentric architectural creation is her brand’s flagship store. (コムデギャルソン; www.comme-des-garcons.com)

Koffee Mameya

COFFEE

At any given time, Koffee Mameya has 15 to 20 different beans on rotation from indie roasters around Japan (and some from overseas). Get a cup brewed on the spot or purchase beans for home use; English-speaking baristas can help you narrow down the selection. (コーヒーマメヤ; www.koffee-mameya.com)

Harajuku Style

Harajuku has reached iconic status as a centre for young, wild street fashion and J-pop culture.

Laforet Harajuku (www.laforet.ne.jp) On the lowest levels of this youth shopping centre, you’ll find the most enticing Gothic Lolita Punk alternative clothing stores. Pick up a ruffled Victorian dolly dress – or try on intricate custom corsets and a leather gas mask at Abilletage.

Closet Child (www.closet-child.com) At this secondhand shop, you can find brand-name Lolita clothing and accessories for around half to a quarter of the original price. Find everything from rare Moi-meme-Moitie Gothic Lolita dresses to platform spiked boots and rave cyber-kimonos.

Dog (https://doghjk.thebase.in) An experimental punk boutique loved by celebs like Lady Gaga. The subterranean space is filled with racks of one-off flamboyant couture, as well as vintage treasures that veer to the apocalyptic and glam rock side.

Tips by La Carmina, award-winning Japan alt fashion and travel blogger @lacarmina

KiddyLand

TOYS

This multistorey toy emporium is packed to the rafters with character goods, including all your Ghibli, Sanrio and Disney faves. It's not just for kids either; you'll spot plenty of adults on a nostalgia trip down the Hello Kitty aisle. (キデイランド; www.kiddyland.co.jp)

Sou-Sou

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Kyoto brand Sou-Sou is best known for making *jikatabi* – the rubber-soled, split-toed shoes worn by construction workers in Japan – in fun, playful prints. It also does clothes and accessories that riff on traditional styles, including some really adorable stuff for kids. (そうそう; http://sousounetshop.jp)

RagTag

CLOTHING

This consignment shop is stocked with labels loved by Harajuku kids, such as Comme des Garçons and Vivienne Westwood. Prices aren't low but the goods are generally in excellent condition. RagTag also has shops in Shibuya and Shinjuku (among other spots). (ラグタグ; www.ragtag.jp)

Chicago Thrift Store

VINTAGE

Chicago is crammed with all sorts of vintage clothing, but best of all is the extensive collection of used kimonos and *yukata* (light cotton kimono), priced from around ¥2000, at the back. It has a few other stores in the neighbourhood, too. Look for the neon sign. (シカゴ; www.chicago.co.jp)

Explore Takeshita-dōri

Takeshita-dōri (竹下通り; map) – Tokyo’s famous fashion bazaar – remains a pilgrimage site for teens from all over Japan (and it can get jammed!). Shopping wise, it’s a mixed bag: newer shops sell trendy, youthful styles alongside stores still invested in the trappings of subcultures from decades past (plaid and safety pins for the punks; colourful tutus for the decora; Victorian dresses for the Gothic Lolitas).

For reasons that are not entirely clear, heavy-on-the-whipped-cream crêpes are the strip’s unofficial street food – a tradition that dates back to the 1970s (though recently Taiwan-style bubble tea shops have been giving the crêpe vendors a run for their money).

Another shopping street to check out is **Cat Street** (キャットストリート). It’s a little chiller and also has some cool boutiques.

ダイソー
DAISO
W♥C
MIJ FACTORY HARAJUKU
MONEY EXCHANGE
外貨両替

Takeshita-dōri | ITZAVU/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Shinjuku

Shinjuku is a whole city within the city. It's breadth and scale are simply awesome – over three million people a day pass through the train station. To the west of the station is Nishi-Shinjuku, a planned district of soaring skyscrapers; to the east, is the city's largest entertainment district, aglitter with coloured LED lights.

Central Rd | JONATHAN STOKES/LONELY PLANET ©

The Short List

➡*Golden Gai Exploring this beloved, bohe-mian night spot packed with tiny bars.*

➡*Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building Taking in the views for free from the 202m- high observatories atop Tokyo's city hall.*

➡*Shinjuku-gyoen Strolling through the former imperial garden, now an urban oasis open to all.*

➡*Godzilla Head Gazing at the enormous statue of Godzilla, lording over Shinjuku.*

➡*Zoetrope Taking a stool at Tokyo's best whisky bar.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote and Chūō-Sōbu lines (among others) stop at Shinjuku.

S The Marunouchi, Toei Ōedo and Toei Shinjuku lines stop at Shinjuku. There are other useful subway stations, such as Shinjuku-sanchōme (Marunouchi, Fukutoshin and Toei Shinjuku lines), good for the east-side shopping and entertainment district; Tochōmae (Toei Ōedo line) is handy for Nishi-Shinjuku.

🚌 The Shinjuku WE Bus makes a loop around the neigh-bourhood, stopping at some key attractions.

Top Experience

Enjoy a Night Out in Golden Gai

Golden Gai is a collection of some 200 tiny bars, seating maybe 10 at most. Each is as unique and eccentric as the 'master' or 'mama' – what owner-bartenders are called – who runs it. The result is something like a cross between a bar and an art installation. In other words, this is more than just a place to drink: it's a whole experience.

やきとり
五十鈴
YAKI TORI
焼き鳥
二階席
OPEN

KHAIKHOLUN VAIPHEI/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

ゴールデン街

http://goldengai.jp

1-1 Kabukichō

S Marunouchi, Fukuoshin or Tōei Shinjuku line to Shinjuku-Sanchōme, exit E2, 🚆 JR Yamanote line to Shinjuku, east exit

☑

Top Tips

➡To reach Golden Gai from Yasukuni-dōri, look for the stone path (on your left walking from Shinjuku Station) after the Mister Donut.

➡Bars that expressly welcome tourists have English signs posted on their doors. Note that many bars have a cover charge (usually ¥500 to ¥1500), which is often posted on the door.

➡Golden Gai is not great for groups. If you’re a party of, say, more than three, then Albatross G or Araku – both a little bigger than average – are your best bet.

➡The bars here get going late, after 9pm; earlier is better if you are a group.

➡The district is highly photogenic, but it’s also private property. Do not take photos unless you get permission first.

🍴

Take a Break

It’s not all bars here: indulge in the classic Tokyo late-night tradition of post-drinks ramen at Nagi.

Get to Know Golden Gai

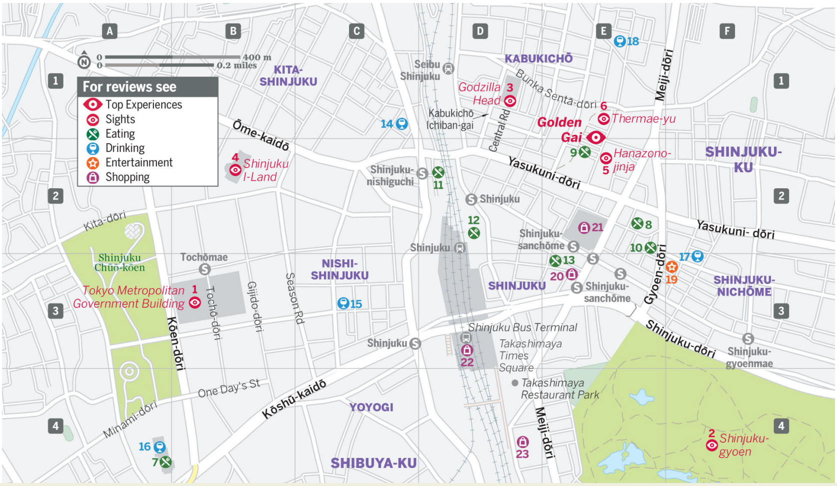
Golden Gai, like Omoide-yokochō, dates from the chaotic, impoverished years following Japan’s defeat in WWII. The rickety, wooden structures that now house bars once housed brothels; when prostitution was banned in 1958, the bartenders moved in.

Shinjuku was an epicentre of counter-culture in the 1960s and Golden Gai became an enclave of bohemia. Originally, many bars functioned more like clubhouses for those working in the creative arts – writers, musicians, *manga-ka* (manga artists), film directors and the like. Some bars still only welcome regulars to preserve that old atmosphere (you might see some doors marked ‘members only’). More recently, however, as new, younger owners take over, the exclusive atmosphere of old is giving way to a lively scene of international bar-hoppers, instinctively drawn to Golden Gai’s free spirit.

Find Your Favourite Bar

Most Golden Gai bars have some sort of theme about which the owner is passionate – be it death metal or French new wave cinema. This is the ultimate Golden Gai experience: to meet up with others who share your niche creative interests and talk on into the morning. But it is also fun to just stroll the lanes and pick a place that suits your mood.

For a sure-bet, classic Golden Gai experience, there is no better spot than **Lonely** (ロンリー), one of the district’s original bars. Bar master Arai-san opened Lonely in 1966 because he wanted his friends to always have a place to go. Some of those friends, like the creator of classic manga *Ashita no Joe* – you’ll see posters on the wall – also happened to be famous. But Lonely is a bar for everyone (we’re also naturally drawn to the name). It’s on Ichi-ban-gai (一番街), the street perpendicular to the alleyways at the Hanazono-jinja side of Golden Gai.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For reviews see
Top Experiences
Sights
Eating
Drinking
Entertainment
Shopping
KITA-SHINJUKU
Seibu Shinjuku
KABUKICHŌ
Bunka Senta-dōri
Godzilla Head 3
Kabukichō Ichiban-gai
Central Rd
Golden Gai
6 Thermae-yu
Meiji-dōri
Hanazono-jinja 5
Ōme-kaidō
4 Shinjuku I-Land
14
Shinjuku-nishiguchi
11
Yasukuni-dōri
Shinjuku
SHINJUKU-KU
12
21
8
10
17
19
Yasukuni-dōri
Kita-dōri
Shinjuku Chūō-kōen
Tochōmae
NISHI-SHINJUKU
Shinjuku
Shinjuku-sanchōme
13
20
Gyoen-dōri
SHINJUKU-NICHŌME
Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building 1
Tochō-dōri
Gijido-dōri
Season Rd
15
SHINJUKU
Shinjuku-sanchōme
Kōen-dōri
Shinjuku Bus Terminal
Shinjuku
22
Takashimaya Times Square
Shinjuku-dōri
Shinjuku-gyoenmae
Takashimaya Restaurant Park
One Day's St
Kōshū-kaidō
Minami-dōri
YOYOGI
Meiji-dōri
2 Shinjuku-gyoen
16
7
23
SHIBUYA-KU
18

Top Experiences

Golden GaiE1

Sights

1Tokyo Metropolitan Government BuildingB3

2Shinjuku-gyoenF4

3Godzilla HeadD1

4Shinjuku I-LandB2

5Hanazono-jinjaE2

6Thermae-yuE1

Eating

7KozueA4

8KanaeE2

9NagiE2

10Donjaca E2

11Omoide-yokochō D2

12Berg D2

13Tsunahachi E3

Drinking

14Zoetrope C1

15Bar BenFiddich C3

16New York Bar A4

17Aiiro Cafe F3

18Roof Top Bar & Terrace G E1

Entertainment

19Shinjuku Pit Inn F3

Shopping

20Beams Japan E3

21Isetan E2

22Akomeya Shinjuku D3

23Books Kinokuniya Tokyo D4

Sights

Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building

OBSERVATORY

Tokyo's city hall – a designed by Tange Kenzō – has observatories (202m) atop both the south and north towers of Building 1 (the views are virtually the same). On a clear day (morning is best), you can catch a glimpse of Mt Fuji beyond the urban sprawl to the west; after dark, it's illuminated buildings all the way to the horizon. Direct-access lifts are on the ground floor; last entry is at 10.30pm.

Symbolic of the city's bureau-cratic might, the granite structure, completed in 1991, looks somewhat like a pixelated cathedral, or perhaps the lair of an animated villain. (東京都庁, Tokyo Tochō; www.metro.tokyo.jp/english/offices)

Shinjuku-gyoen

GARDENS

Completed in 1906, Shinjuku-gyoen was designed as an imperial retreat; since opening to the public in 1951, it has become a favourite destination for Tokyoites seeking a quick escape from the hurly-burly of city life. The spacious manicured lawns are perfect for picnicking. Don't miss the greenhouse with its spectacular orchids; the Taiwanese-style pavilion (Goryō-tei) that overlooks the garden's central pond; and the cherry blossoms in spring. (新宿御苑; www.env.go.jp/garden/shinjukugyoen)

Godzilla Head

STATUE

Godzilla, a portmanteau of the Japanese words for gorilla *(gorira)* and whale *(kujira),* is king of the *kaijū* (strange beasts) that ruled Japanese popular cinema for decades. This giant statue of him looking to take a bite out of a skyscraper is a (relatively new) Shinjuku landmark. Every so often he roars to life, with glowing eyes and smoky breath. (ゴジラヘッド)

Godzilla Head | JONATHAN STOKES/LONELY PLANET ©

◉Shinjuku I-Land

PUBLIC ART

This otherwise ordinary office complex is home to more than a dozen public artworks, including one of Robert Indiana's *LOVE* sculptures (on the southeast corner) and two *Tokyo Brushstroke* sculptures by Roy Lichtenstein (at the back, towards Ōme-kaidō). See the website for a complete photo directory of all the works.

The open-air courtyard, with stonework by Giulio Paolini and several reasonably priced restau-rants, makes an attractive lunch or coffee stop. (新宿アイランド; www.shinjuku-i-land.com)

◉Hanazono-jinja

SHINTO SHRINE

Founded in the 17th century (but currently in a fairly modern building), this shrine is dedicated to the god Inari, whose specialities include fertility and worldly success – it’s popular with business owners from nearby Kabukichō. Most Sundays from dawn to dusk the shrine hosts a small **flea market,** which is best visited in the morning. (花園神社; www.hanazono-jinja.or.jp)

Thermae-yu

ONSEN

This sparkling-clean all-night onsen (hot springs) complex is the most literal example to date that red-light district Kabukichō is cleaning up its act. The tubs, which include several indoor and outdoor ones (sex-segregated), are filled with honest-to-goodness natural hot-spring water (trucked in daily). Towels included; no tattoos allowed. (テルマー湯; www.thermae-yu.jp)

Eating

Kozue

JAPANESE

¥¥¥

It’s hard to beat Kozue’s combi-nation of exquisite seasonal Japanese cuisine, artisan crockery and distractingly good views over Shinjuku from the 40th floor of the Park Hyatt. As the kimono-clad staff speak English and the restaurant caters well to dietary restrictions and personal preferences, this is a good splurge spot for diners who don’t want to give up complete control. Reservations essential for dinner and recommended for lunch. (梢; https://restaurants.tokyo.park.hyatt.co.jp/en/koz.html)

Kanae

IZAKAYA

¥¥

Kanae is a perfect example of one of Shinjuku-sanchōme's excellent and all but undiscover-able *izakaya:* high-quality sashimi, seasonal delicacies, simple staples (the potato salad is famous) and choice sake in the basement of an unremarkable building. Look for the white sign and then the cedar frond ball over the staircase. Reservations recommended. (鼎; https://a633000.gorp.jp)

Nagi

RAMEN

¥

Nagi, once an edgy upstart in the ramen world, now has branches around the city. This tiny shop is the original, located up a treacherous stairway in Golden Gai. The house speciality is *niboshi* ramen (egg noodles in a broth flavoured with dried sardines). There's often a queue but we think it's worth it. Look for the sign with a red circle. (凪; www.n-nagi.com)

Donjaca

IZAKAYA

¥¥

Donjaca, in business since 1979, has many telltale signs of a classic Shōwa-era (1926–89) *izakaya*: red vinyl stools, lantern lighting and hand-written menus covering the wall. The food is equal parts classic (grilled fish and fried chicken) and inventive: a house speciality is *nattō gyōza* (dumplings stuffed with fermented soybeans). Quality sake, too. If the main shop is full, staff will likely direct you around the corner to the larger annex. (呑者家; https://g873801.gorp.jp/)

Omoide-yokochō

YAKITORI

¥

‘Memory Lane’ – less politely known as Shonben-yokochō (‘Drunkard’s Alley’) – is one of Tokyo’s most recognisable sights. This 1940s vintage informal market has for decades housed dozens of tiny bars and restaurants, most of which serve *yakitori* (chicken, and other meats or vegetables, grilled on skewers). It’s a fun, lively experience that gets going after dark; some restaurants have English menus. (思い出横丁; https://en.shinjuku-omoide.com)

焼きとり
野菜焼き
お勧め！

Yakitori restaurant, Omoide-yokochō | VASSAMON ANANSUKKASEM/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Berg

CAFE

¥

In the basement of ever-chaotic Shinjuku Station, Berg stands still. The cramped, long-running, cult-status coffee shop still charges a very retro ¥220 for a cup (and ¥330 for a beer). The highly recommended ‘morning set’ *(mōningu setto),* served until noon, includes coffee, hard-boiled egg, potato salad and toast. The front is covered in picture menus.

Exiting the east exit ticket gates in JR Shinjuku Station, follow signs to Lumine Est and look for the ‘Food Pocket’ sign off to the left. (ベルグ; www.berg.jp)

Tsunahachi

TEMPURA

¥¥

Tsunahachi has been expertly frying prawns and veggies for a century and is an easy place to be initiated in the art of tempura. Come at lunch for inexpensive set meals (dinner is a little pricier but still very reasonable). Tsunahachi has few other branches inside department stores around town; this is the main shop, with indigo curtains over the door. (つな八; www.tunahachi.co.jp)

Department Store Food Courts & Rooftops

Shinjuku Station is surrounded by shopping centres and depart-ment stores, all of which have restaurant floors on their upper levels – perfect for when you want to grab a quick bite to eat without having to brave the crowded streets. **Takashimaya Restaurant Park** (Map p118, D4; www.restaurants-park.jp), part of **Takashimaya Times Square** and accessed via the JR New South exit, has the nicest selection of restaurants, including branches of some famous ones, like **Ningyocho Imahan** – sister shop to Asakusa Imahan.

Within JR Shinjuku Station, before you reach the New South exit ticket gates, there are a number of good takeaway vendors – perfect for when you’re catching the Narita Express or a long-distance bus; you can also sit and eat on the terrace outside the ticket gates.

From Shinjuku-sanchōme subway station you can directly access the department store Isetan, which has a fantastic basement food hall, with *bentō* (boxed meals), fresh steamed dumplings and more. The department store also has a little-known free rooftop garden, where you can sit and eat.

Drinking

Zoetrope

BAR

A must-visit for whisky fans, Zoetrope has over a hundred varieties of Japanese whisky behind its small counter, including many hard-to-find bottles and already-sold-out limited editions. It's a one-man team and the bartender has a wealth of knowledge: tell him what you like and you're in good hands. Note that the bar may not be able to accommodate large groups. (ゾートロープ; www.facebook.com/ShotBarZoetrope)

Bar BenFiddich

COCKTAIL BAR

Bar BenFiddich – consistently ranked one of the top bars in the world – is dark and tiny, with vials of infusions on the shelves and herbs hung to dry from the ceiling. There's no menu, so just tell the bartenders what you like and they'll concoct something delicious for you. Come early for the best chance at a seat.

There's no sign on the street, but it's on the 9th floor of the building with a curry shop on the ground floor (next to the karaoke parlour). (バーベンフィディック; www.facebook.com/BarBenfiddich)

New York Bar

BAR

Head to the Park Hyatt's 52nd floor to swoon over the sweeping nightscape from the floor-to-ceiling windows at this bar of *Lost in Translation* fame. For the best chance of scoring a choice seat, go early (and watch the sky fade to black). Note that the cover charge here is hefty (¥2750) and drinks about the same; dress code enforced (check the website for details).

The 41st-floor **Peak Bar & Lounge** (http://restaurants.tokyo.park.hyatt.co.jp/en/pbr.html) is slightly more affordable and still has great views. (ニューヨークバー; http://restaurants.tokyo.park.hyatt.co.jp/en/nyb.html)

Aiiro Cafe

LGBTIQ+

Aiiro (formerly known as Advocates) has long been *the* place to get an evening started in Tokyo's gaybourhood, Shinjuku-nichōme – thanks to the all-you-can-drink beer happy-hour special for ¥1000 from 6pm to 9pm daily. The bar itself is teeny-tiny; the action happens on the street corner outside, which swells to block-party proportions when the weather is nice. There's a rainbow *torii* (gate) out front; you can't miss it. (http://aliving.net/aiirocafe/)

Roof Top Bar & Terrace G

BAR

The drinks and decor here are totally average, but we're a sucker for an open-air rooftop bar – not as common as you'd think in Tokyo, where the night views are always divine (even if, in this case, it's partly of the gentrifying red-light district). The bar is inside the Shinjuku Granbell Hotel. (www.granbellhotel.jp/shinjuku/restaurant/bar)

Entertainment

Shinjuku Pit Inn

JAZZ

This is Tokyo’s best jazz spot: intimate, unpretentious and with an always solid line-up of influential, avant-garde, crossover and up-and-coming musicians from Japan and abroad. If you’re already a fan of jazz, you’ll want to make a point to visit it; if you’re not, Pit Inn is the kind of place that just might win you over. (新宿ピットイン; www.pit-inn.com)

Shopping

Beams Japan

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Beams, a national chain of trendsetting boutiques, is a Japanese cultural institution and this multistorey Shinjuku branch has a particular audience in mind: you, the traveller. It’s full of the latest Japanese streetwear labels, traditional fashions with cool modern twists, artisan crafts, pop art and more – all contenders for that perfect only-in-Tokyo souvenir. (ビームス·ジャパン; www.beams.co.jp/shop/j)

Isetan

DEPARTMENT STORE

Isetan is Tokyo’s most fashion-forward department store. Head to the 2nd-floor Tokyo Closet and 3rd-floor Re-Style boutiques in the main building, and the 2nd floor of the men’s building to discover new Japanese brands that haven’t (yet) hit the big time. Other reasons to visit: the homewares from contemporary artisans (5th floor) and the excellent *depachika* (basement gourmet food hall). (伊勢丹; www.mistore.jp/store/shinjuku.html)

Akomeya Shinjuku

FOOD & DRINKS

Nominally a rice (‘*kome*’) speci-ality store, stylish Akomeya also stocks classic Japanese pantry items (from artisan producers) and a choice collection of kitchen, home and bath items. It’s in the Shinjuku Bus Terminal mall (NEWoMan), and is perfect for picking up last-minute gifts and souvenirs before catching the train or bus to the airport. (www.akomeya.jp)

🛍 Books Kinokuniya Tokyo

BOOKS

A long-time lifeline for Tokyo’s foreign community, Kinokuniya stocks a broad selection of books and magazines in many languages (but mostly English). Particularly of note is the fantastic collection of books on Japan and translated Japanese literature. There are notes from staff with their recommendations. Access is directly from the passageway on the 5th floor of Takashimaya Times Square. (紀伊國屋書店; www.kinokuniya.co.jp/c/store/Books-Kinokuniya-Tokyo)

Experience Kabukichō

Shinjuku’s Kabukichō district, which covers several blocks north of Yasukuni-dōri, was famously named for a kabuki theatre that was never built. Instead, it became Tokyo’s largest red-light district, full of cabarets, peep shows, ‘love hotels’ and more. Government crackdowns and gentrification mean the Kabukichō of today is less a centre of sex and organised crime than it once was (though seedy areas do still exist). The TV show *Tokyo Vice* (2022), set largely in late 1990s Kabukichō, is a fairly realistic portrayal of the neighbourhood at the time.

You can spot the entrance to Kabukichō on Yasukuni-dōri by the flashing neon red gate. It’s generally safe to walk through, though both men and women (and particularly women walking alone) may attract unwanted attention, especially late at night. (Don’t follow touts anywhere; it never ends well.) There are also plenty of establishments here that have no naughty implications, including regular hotels (including several budget hotels aimed at foreign travellers) and the Godzilla Head statue.

Worth a Trip

Be Enchanted by Ghibli Museum, Mitaka

Since 1986 master animator Miyazaki Hayao and his Studio Ghibli (pronounced ji-bu-ri) have been responsible for some of the best-loved films in Japan – and the world. Miyazaki designed this museum himself, and it's redolent of the dreamy, vaguely steampunk atmosphere that makes his animations so enchanting. The only catch: tickets must be bought in advance, and you must choose the exact time and date you plan to visit.

三鷹の森
ジブリ美術館
GHIBLI MUSEUM, MITAKA
300m→

ILIANA CLARISA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

ジブリ美術館

www.ghibli-museum.jp

1-1-83 Shimo-Renjaku

adult ¥1000, child ¥100-700

🕒10am-6pm, closed Tue & irregularly

☑
Top Tips

➡Tickets sell out fast, especially during the summer school holiday.

➡Buy tickets up to four months in advance from a travel agent – the best option as you can reserve earlier.

➡Otherwise get tickets a month in advance from convenience store Lawson's online ticket portal; details are on the website.

🍴
Take a Break

The museum has its own cafe, but it's routinely packed. Instead try **Blue Sky Coffee** (ブルー スカイコーヒー; http://blueskycoffee.jp; 📋) in nearby Inokashira-kōen; it's a Ghibli-esque wooden cottage with a state-of-the-art coffee roaster and espresso machine.

☑
Getting There

🚆 JR Chūō-Sōbu line to Mitaka; get a shuttle from the south exit, No 9 bus stop (every 20 minutes)

Get to Know Ghibli

If you've seen a Ghibli movie, the odds are it was 2001's *Spirited Away,* which won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature (and remains the only Japanese animated film and only hand-drawn film ever to win). Here's a chance to further explore Ghibli's world: inside the museum is an imagined workshop filled with the kinds of books and artworks that inspired Miyazaki. There's also a small theatre where original animated shorts – which can only be seen here! – are screened (you'll get a ticket for this when you enter).

Meet Friends Old & New

The Ghibli Museum rewards curiosity and play: peer through a small window, for example, and you'll see little soot sprites (as seen in *Spirited Away*). A spiral staircase leads to a purposely overgrown rooftop terrace with a 5m-tall statue of the Robot Soldier (pictured) from *Laputa* (*Castle in the Sky*; 1986). A highlight for children (sorry, grown-ups!) is a giant, plush replica of the cat bus from the classic *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) that kids can climb on. Of course the museum gift shop has plenty of tempting character goods.

Nearby: Inokashira-kōen

The Ghibli Museum is actually in the corner of one of Tokyo's best parks, **Inokashira-kōen** (井の頭公園; www.kensetsu.metro.tokyo.jp/seibuk/inokashira/index.html). Instead of heading back to Mitaka Station, follow the woodsy strolling paths (signposted in English) through the park to Kichijōji Station (also on the JR Chūō line). It takes about 30 minutes, unless of course you are tempted by the park's many attractions – which include swan-shaped pedal boats and an ancient shrine to the sea goddess Benzaiten.

Kōraku, Kanda & Akihabara

Akihabara is well known as a pop culture centre, drawing fans of manga, anime and games from around the world. Other central districts have less name recognition, though they have a lot to offer, in terms of both sights and character: this is a historic part of town, where people have deep roots. Meanwhile, a high concentration of universities gives the area an intellectual cachet.

LAOX
オノデン
免税 TAX FREE
冷蔵庫 洗濯機
都内・近郊 送料無料
お見積り無料です
防犯カメラ販売開始!!
加湿機 カーペット ストーブ エアコン 4F
TAKARADA TAX-FREE 免税商店
歓迎光臨
TAX FREE 免税店 特売中!!
Duty Free Flagship Store
免税
면세점
LAOX Home Electronics Store
HOBBY PARADISE
ボークス 秋葉原 ホビー天国
Panasonic ONODEN
ONODEN
CAMERS
GAME
お部屋探しは 7F
ホビーランド ぽち 6F 秋葉原 2号店
KO&SLOT
ACE TAKU

Akihabara | EASY CAMERA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

The Short List

➡*Koishikawa Kōrakuen Exploring Tokyo's oldest (and very photogenic) landscape garden.*

➡*Kanda Myōjin Discovering a historically important shrine in the heart of central Tokyo.*

➡*Spa LaQua Getting a Tokyo onsen experience.*

➡*Tokyo Dome Seeing baseball, Japan-style.*

➡*Akihabara Strolling through Tokyo's subculture capital.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote stops at Akihabara and Kanda. The JR Sōbu line stops at Suidōbashi, Ochanomizu and Akihabara; the Chūō also stops at Ochanomizu and Kanda.

S The Marunouchi and Namboku lines stop at Kōrakuen. The Hibiya line stops at Akihabara. The Ginza line stops at Kanda and Suehirochō. The Toei Mita line stops at Suidōbashi and Jimbōchō; the Hanzomon and Toei Shinjuku lines also stop at Jimbōchō.

Top Experience

Take a Journey Through Koishikawa Kōrakuen

Koishikawa Kōrakuen is among Tokyo's oldest and most prestigious gardens. Construction began in 1629, making it an early example of an Edo-style strolling garden. Paths meander around a central pond, over bridges and past groves of trees, revealing, at points, scenes in miniature of famous locations around Japan (and China as well). Meanwhile, there is always something in bloom.

TAKASHI IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

小石川後楽園

www.tokyo-park.or.jp/park/format/index030.html

adult/child ¥300/free

🕘9am-5pm

🚇Ōedo line to Iidabashi, exit C3

Top Tips

➡There are two entrances: the east gate and the west gate; to better appreciate the flow of the garden, enter via the east gate, for which Suidōbashi is the most convenient station.

➡The garden is particularly well known for its plum blossoms in February, irises in June and autumn leaves in November.

➡During peak summer, *wagasa* (traditional oil paper parasols) are free to borrow.

➡English signposts explain the famous views that appear throughout the garden.

Take a Break

The garden has a teahouse, **Kantoku-tei**, with glass-fronted panels for views over the garden. It serves *matcha* (powdered green tea) or coffee with a traditional seasonal sweet, as well as simple meals and other Japanese-style desserts.

A Garden for the Ages

Koishikawa Kōrakuen was created for a powerful *daimyō* (feudal lord). At the time, such gardens were much in vogue among the elite, both as a place for quiet sanctuary and to impress guests. The name, Kōrakuen, derived from a Chinese phrase, means something like ‘worry first, enjoy later’ – wise advice for someone with power. The garden was once four times the size it is today; sadly much was lost in the era of rapid modernisation. A common element of Edo-era strolling gardens is *shakkei* (borrowed scenery) – which would likely be a mountain in the distance – but in this case includes Tokyo Dome.

A Timeless Excursion

Koishikawa Kōrakuen also has elements of an ‘excursion garden’. Back when travel was difficult and dangerous, such gardens provided an escape of sorts. Entering from the east gate, and beyond the recently rebuilt **Kara-mon** (Chinese-style gate), follow the cobblestone **Nobedan**, which was designed to evoke the journey along the old foot highway from Tokyo to Kyoto via Nagano. You’ll arrive at the garden’s **central pond** – a stand-in for Lake Biwa, a famous lake just outside Kyoto.

Famous Views

The garden’s most famous feature is the arched stone bridge **Engetsu-kyō** (Full-Moon Bridge) – the name makes sense when you see the reflection in the waters below. The earthen bridge **Togetsu-kyō** (Moon Crossing Bridge) is a stand-in for the famous one in Kyoto’s Arashiyama district; while the photogenic red lacquer **Tsūten-kyō** (Bridge to Heaven) is named after the one at Kyoto temple Tōfuku-ji (where it, too, is surrounded by maples). In the centre of the pond is a craggy rock island called **Hōrai-jima**, which represents the Taoist ‘Isle of Immortals’ – an example of Chinese influence on the garden design.

Walking Tour

An Afternoon in Akihabara

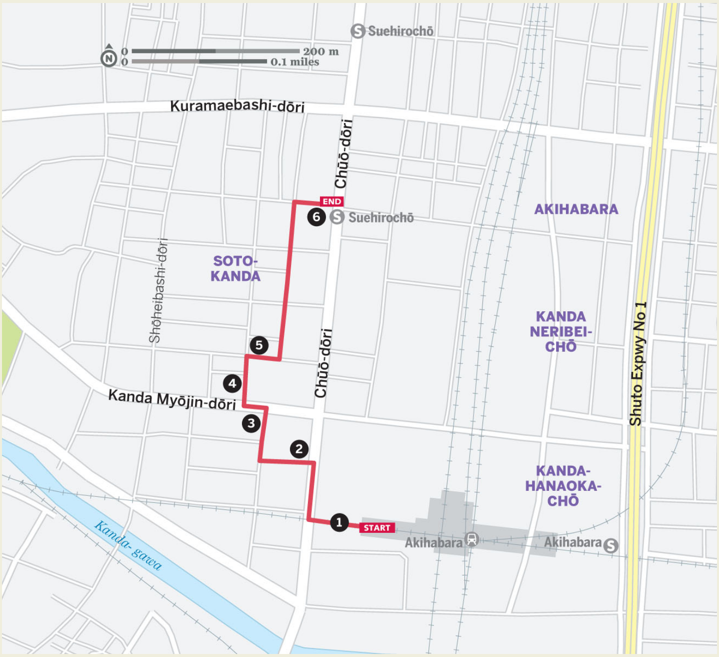
Akihabara (Akiba to friends) is Tokyo's otaku (geek) subculture centre. But you don't have to obsess about manga (Japanese comics) or anime (Japanese animation) to enjoy this quirky neighbourhood. It's equal parts sensory overload and cultural mind-bender. In fact, as the otaku subculture gains more influence on the culture at large, Akiba is drawing more visitors who don't fit the stereotype.

Walk Facts

Start JR Akihabara Station, Electric Town exit

End Suehirochō Station

Length 1km; one hour



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START
KANDA NERIBEI-CHŌ
Kanda Myōjin-dōri
Chūō-dōri
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KANDA-HANAOKA-CHŌ
Akihabara
Akihabara
Kanda-gawa

❶

Akihabara Radio Center

Before Akihabara became *otaku*-land, it was Electric Town – the place for discounted electronics and where early computer geeks tracked down obscure parts for home-built machines. **Akihabara Radio Center**, a warren of stalls under the train tracks, keeps the tradition alive, selling all kinds of chips, switches and transistor radio parts. Look for the faded red-and-white awning; note that many shops here close on the weekend.

❷

GiGO 3

In Akihabara, a love of the new is tempered by a deep affection for the old. More and more arcades are adding floors of vintage consoles – think arcade versions of *Tetris*, *Street Fighter* and *Super Mario Kart*. **GiGO 3**, on main drag Chūō-dōri, has the best selection, along with several floors of UFO catchers. (GiGO is the company that bought out Sega's arcade business in 2022.)

❸

@Home Cafe

Maid cafes – where waitresses dress as French maids and treat customers with giggling deference as *go-shujinsama* (master) or *o-jōsama* (mistress, or sometime princess) – are an Akiba institution. There are multiple competing franchises, but **@Home**, one of the biggest, is set up well for overseas visitors, with English menus and usually some English-speaking maids. Their newest branch in the Akiba Cultures Zone building is the nicest. This is pure fantasy land, with nothing sexual about it.

❹

Akibaoo 0

Back to the Akiba of old: **Akibaoo 0** is part of a local franchise – well, a half-dozen tiny stores scattered about – that swears its prices are lower than the big-name stores (though it won't tell us how). It's a local experience, and also a place to pick up a cheap USB cable, ring light or at home *tako-yaki* (grilled octopus dumpling) maker.

❺

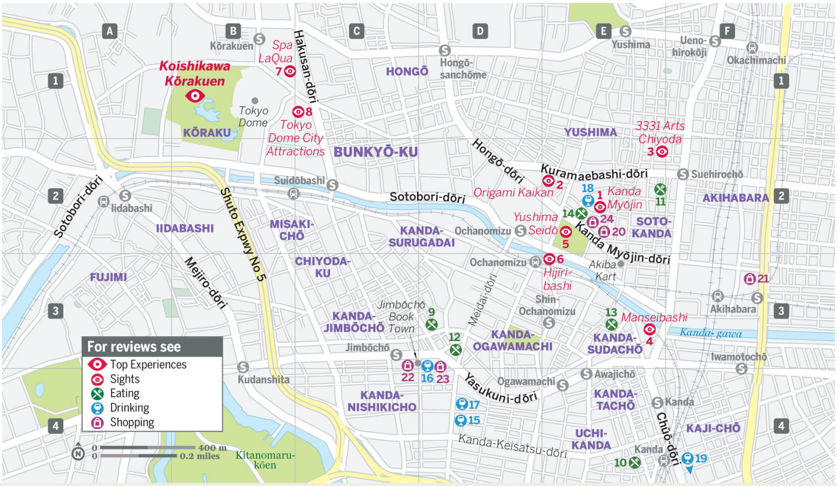
Mandarake Complex

This is highly debatable, of course, but **Mandarake Complex** might just be the most classic Akihabara destination for *otaku* (geeks): eight storeys are piled high with comic books, action figures, cosplay accessories, cel art and more.

❻

Gachapon Kaikan

Gachapon – vending machines that dispense plastic capsules containing small toys – have been around for decades, and yet each generation seems to fall for them. **Gachapon Kaikan** has literally hundreds of options offering everything from old-school Ultraman figurines to the latest hot new drops (like amulets to protect yourself from social media pitfalls and animals posing as politicians apologising at press conferences). From here you're near Suehirochō Station, or keep walking to 3331 Arts Chiyoda.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Kōrakuen
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Hakusan-dōri
Hongō-sanchōme
HONGŌ
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Sotobori-dōri
Iidabashi
IIDABASHI
Shuto Expwy No 5
MISAKI-CHŌ
KANDA-SURUGADAI
Ochanomizu
Yushima Seidō
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SOTO-KANDA
Kanda Myōjin-dōri
FUJIMI
Mejiro-dōri
CHIYODA-KU
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Kanda
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Chūō-dōri
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Kanda
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Sights

◉Kanda Myōjin

SHINTO SHRINE

Kanda Myōjin is one of Tokyo's oldest and most prestigious shrines, set in its current location since 1616 (though the current building itself is not that old). In addition to the rather grand gate and main shrine, don't miss **Edo-jinja**, a small sub-structure where you can see one of the elaborate *mikoshi* (portable shrines) used in the temple's famous festival. As the nearest major shrine to Akihabara, Kanda Myōjin sells amulets to protect your elec-tronics and favourite animated characters. (神田明神, Kanda Shrine; www.kandamyoujin.or.jp)

◉Origami Kaikan

ARTS CENTRE

By now you've probably encountered origami cranes – the most iconic example of the quintessential Japanese art of paper folding. To see how much more elaborate the art form can get, visit the gallery here on the first two floors. On the 3rd floor, demonstrations often take place, and there are lots of gorgeous papers and how-to books (English ones included) for sale. Original origami paper is made in the 4th-floor workshop, where you can take a peek. Check online for information on exhibitions, classes and workshops. (おりがみ会館; www.origamikaikan.co.jp; 👪)

◉3331 Arts Chiyoda

ARTS CENTRE

A major exhibition space, smaller art galleries and creative studios now occupy this former high school, which has evolved into a forward-thinking art and community hub for Akiba. It's a fascinating place to explore, though not all galleries have shows on at once. There’s also a cafe, a gift shop with original items and a terrace for hanging out in the front. (www.3331.jp; 👪)

👁 Manseibashi

HISTORIC BUILDING

This red-brick train station, built in 1912 – two years before Tokyo Station – was retired in 1943. But about a decade ago the building was renovated and restored; there are some shops inside, but the highlight is the wooden deck that runs the length of the station along the Kanda-gawa, offering breezy views of the bridges that criss-cross this major Tokyo waterway. There’s also a small museum inside that has some neat old books about Japan in English. (万世橋; www.ejrcf.or.jp/mansei/english)

👁 Yushima Seidō

CONFUCIAN SITE

Established in 1691 and later used as a school during the Tokugawa regime, this is one of only a handful of Confucian sites in Tokyo. Highlights include a 4.5m-tall bronze statue of Confucius and the black-lacquered main hall (Taisei-den; rebuilt in 1935). Students from nearby universities are known to come here to pray for luck during exam season. (湯島聖堂; www.seido.or.jp)

👁 Hijiri-bashi

BRIDGE

Hijiri-bashi is an attractive 1927- vintage bridge that arches over the Kanda-gawa at Ochano-mizu. But what it’s really known for is train-spotting: from the east side of the bridge you can see three train lines weave under and over each other: the Chūō line, the Sōbu line and the Marunouchi subway line, where it briefly runs above ground. (聖橋)

Spa LaQua

ONSEN

One of Tokyo's few true onsen, this chic spa complex, renovated in 2017, relies on natural hot-spring water from 1700m below ground. There are indoor and outdoor baths and saunas, plus add-on massage and exfoliation treatments. An extra fee gives you access to the 'Healing Baden' area, with even more saunas. Towels are included; visitors with tattoos will unfortunately be denied admission. (スパ ラクーア; www.laqua.jp)

Tokyo Dome City Attractions

AMUSEMENT PARK

The top attraction here is Thunder Dolphin, a roller coaster that cuts a heart-in-your-throat course around the tightly packed buildings of downtown. There's also a ferris wheel that offers views over the city centre, plus plenty of low-key, child-friendly rides. Check online before visiting as some attractions may be closed for maintenance or bad weather. (東京ドームシティアトラクションズ; www.tokyo-dome.co.jp)

Thunder Dolphin, Tokyo Dome City Attractions | KUREMO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Akiba Kart

Experiencing Tokyo as if in a real-life video game – by cruising around city streets in a go-kart – has become a top bucket list activity for many. For reasons that are unclear, this is actually legal; however, you must have a valid International Driving Permit (or a Japanese driver's licence). **Akiba Kart** (アキバカート; http://akibanavi.net) runs one- or two-hour tours, following a brief primer on how to drive the karts. Reserve in advance (online or via Facebook messenger), and check the FAQs for more details.

Eating

Maruka

UDON

¥

This udon shop, which specialises in Kagawa-style udon – thick with a springy texture – is considered by many to be among the best in town. It's long been a favourite of local students, because you can get a simple bowl for under ¥500 (a little more if you want to add some crisp, lightly battered tempura). Communal seating and nearly always a queue. (丸香)

Blind Donkey

GASTRONOMY

¥¥¥

Kanda is known for its no-frills *izakaya* (Japanese-style pub eateries), and yet here is the Blind Donkey serving farm-to-table goodness, helmed by a Chez Panisse (California) veteran. Almost everything is sourced direct from producers, and the results are seasonal dishes like scallop carpaccio with chicory and *yuzu* (a kind of citrus) preserves. Reservations recommended. (www.theblinddonkey.jp/en)

Tanaka Soba-ya

RAMEN

¥

The ramen competition is stiff in Akihabara, but recently the spotlight is shining on Tanaka Soba-ya, which specialises in Kitakata-style ramen (Kitakata is a small town in Fukushima prefecture that is famous for ramen). So it’s country-style ramen with a Tokyo sheen: thick crinkly noodles in a light, salty pork-bone broth, with a splash of pork fat for just enough richness. (田中そば店; www.tanaka-shoten.net)

Curry-ya Bambi

JAPANESE CURRY

¥

Among the dozens of Jimbōchō curry shops packed into a few blocks, all serving different styles, Bambi stands out for its classic Japanese-style curry: a little bit sweet, a little less spicy (but still with a kick), with a dark brown roux served over sticky rice. The signature dish is the pork curry, with tender, slow-cooked meat. (カレー屋ばんび; www.instagram.com/curry.ya.banbi)

Kanda Yabu Soba

SOBA

¥

Kanda Yabu Soba has been in business since 1880. The restaurant was rebuilt after a fire in 2013, but the commitment to excellent soba remains the same: handmade, with a buckwheat-to-flour ratio of 10:1, for just the right bite. Get them simple, hot or cold, or with tempura shrimp or slices of duck breast. (神田やぶそば; www.yabusoba.net)

Amanoya

SWEETS

¥

This long-running teahouse (since 1846) specialises in *amazake,* a naturally sweet and milky (non-alcoholic) fermented rice drink.

There are other traditional sweets on the menu, too, including various *mochi* treats. But the real treat might be the decor, which is full of eclectic bits and bobs like model trains and carved masks. Amanoya has blue door curtains and a pine tree at the entrance. (天野屋; www.amanoya.jp)

Baseball at Tokyo Dome

Even if you don't follow baseball, it's worth catching a game in Tokyo just to experience the culture around it. Fans stage perfectly coordinated chants and young women called *uriko* work the stands with tireless cheer selling draught beer from kegs strapped to their backs. And while you can buy hot dogs, you can also buy *tako-yaki* (grilled octopus dumplings) and *yaki-soba* (soba noodle stir-fry) to eat in the stands.

Tokyo Dome (東京ドーム; www.tokyo-dome.co.jp/en/tourists/dome), aka 'Big Egg', is home to the Yomiuri Giants, the most consistently successful team in Japanese baseball. (Tokyo has two teams: the Giants, and their crosstown rivals and perpetual underdogs, the Yakult Swallows.) Baseball season runs from the end of March to the end of October. Giants tickets can sell out in advance; get them early at www.giants.jp.

Tokyo Dome is part of **Tokyo Dome City**, which also includes Spa LaQua, Tokyo Dome City Attractions, a mall and a food court. Suidōbashi is the most convenient station.

Tokyo Dome | CHARLY TRIBALLEAU/GETTY IMAGES ©

Drinking

Glitch Coffee & Roasters

COFFEE

In a span of a few years, Glitch went from being just another third-wave roaster to perhaps the definitive Tokyo coffee shop. Its signature style is a light roast, while its selection of single-origin beans is extremely well curated, including some rare finds and accompanied by detailed tasting notes. Get a hand pour to drink in house or purchase beans to go. (グリッチコーヒー・ロースターズ; http://glitchcoffee.com)

Ladrio

CAFE

Ladrio, running since 1949, is a classic Jimbōchō *kissaten* – what coffee shops were called before ‘cafe’ came into vogue. It’s got that classic *kissa* look, with low wooden tables, vinyl banquettes and dim lighting. Dark roast coffee is served in dainty cups with saucers, but our favourite thing to order is the ‘coffee jelly’, which comes smothered in homemade brandy-spiked whipped cream. (ラドリオ; www.instagram.com/jimbocho_ladrio)

Hitachino Brewing Lab

CRAFT BEER

Sake brewery Kiuchi has been brewing its excellent range of Hitachino Nest craft beers since 1996. At this dedicated outlet you can have a very merry time working your way from the white beer to the sweet stout while gazing across the Kanda-gawa from the terrace seating. It’s part of the red-brick former Mansei-bashi train station complex. (https://hitachino.cc/brewing-lab/;📶)

Cocktail Works Jimbōchō

COCKTAIL BAR

Craft gin is a trend that is just kicking off in Japan and this bar is among the best places to sample the latest products coming out of Japanese distilleries. Try them in classic gin and tonics or in signature cocktails like the ‘Ki No Bihaku’, made from Ki No Bi gin, *sanshō* (a kind of pepper), *amazake* (nonalcoholic fermented rice milk) and lemon. (カクテルワークス神保町; www.cocktailworks-jinbocho.com)

Imasa

CAFE

It’s not every day you get to sip your coffee or tea in a cultural property. Imasa is the real deal: an old timber merchant’s shop-house dating from 1927 but with Edo-era design and detail, and a few pieces of contemporary furniture. Very few houses like this exist in Tokyo or are open to the public. (井政; www.kanda-imasa.co.jp) o Ochanomizu, Hijiri-bashi exit)

Beer-Ma Kanda

CRAFT BEER

Down an alley of drinking dens is this brightly lit nirvana for craft-beer lovers. It's principally a bottle shop stocking hundreds of different beer brands, all of which you can buy and drink on the premises (corkage ¥220). There's also eight taps of barrel beer available, usually including at least one Japanese craft brew. (びあマ神田; https://biama-kanda.com)

Jimbōchō Book Town

This fascinating neighbourhood has more than 170 new and secondhand bookshops. It's one of Tokyo's many 'towns' where like-minded shops gather. (Kappabashi-dōri in Asakusa is another example.) Amid the tottering stacks of volumes, you can find everything from antique guidebooks to the Yoshiwara pleasure district to fashion magazines from the 1980s and '90s. Two of our favourite shops are Ohya Shobō and Komiyama Shoten.

As befitting a neighbourhood full of bookshops, Jimbōchō also has lots of cafes – perfect for holing up with a book. For a classic Jimbōchō coffee experience, head to Ladrio; for a more contemporary one, check out Glitch Coffee & Roasters.

Jimbōchō is also famous for its high concentration of curry shops. One theory is that curry – which can be eaten with a spoon in hand – is the perfect meal to accompany a book. To sample Japanese-style curry, give Bambi a try.

Shopping

Y. & Sons

FASHION & ACCESSORIES

Bespoke tailor Y. & Sons creates contemporary kimono that are 100% *iki* (chic and urbane), design-ed to look good over a T-shirt and paired with leather trainers. Prices start at ¥50,000 and go up depend-ing on the material. They take three weeks to complete (after one initial fitting); international shipping is available. (www.yandsons.com)

Yodobashi-Akiba

ELECTRONICS

There are Yodobashi Camera branches all over Tokyo but then there is Yodobashi-Akiba, which includes not only six floors of electronics – for everything from state-of-the-art camera and audio equipment to household and beauty appliances – but also a very Akihabara food court (full of comfort food options like *tonkatsu* and curry) and a batting cage. There are usually English-speaking staff on the electronics floors. (ヨドバシAkiba; www.yodobashi-akiba.com)

Komiyama Shoten

BOOKS

Komiyama Shoten, running since 1939, stocks an incredible selection of art and photography books (including many in English) as well as posters and prints – with some very famous Japanese and international artists represented. Every spare inch of wall is given over to gallery space. (小宮山書店; www.book-komiyama.co.jp)

Ohya Shobō

BOOKS

Ohya Shobō has been specialising in books, maps and *ukiyo-e* (wood-block prints) since 1882. Originals cost hundreds or thousands of dollars (and are snapped up by collectors), but the shop also stocks reprints starting at only a few thousand yen (and it’s just a neat place to visit). (大屋書房; www.ohya-shobo.com)

Meishu Center

ALCOHOL

Meishu Center stocks over 200 kinds of sake. But while most bottle shops have limited tasting counters, here everything is up for grabs. Pick out three bottles that look good and settle in for a *nomi-kurabe* (tasting) set – and repeat at will. Everything is available for purchase. Oh, and it opens from early afternoon. (名酒センター; https://nihonshu.com/)

Ueno & Yanesen

Ueno is oft-described as Tokyo's cultural heart. The Tokyo National Museum – among Japan's top museums – is located here, along with other museums and cultural institutions, all gathered in an expansive park, Ueno-kōen. Yanesen, meanwhile, is the colloquial name for the collective (and collectively charming) neighbourhoods of Yanaka, Nezu and Sendagi – a part of the city where time seems to stand still.

Ueno-kōen | BENNYMARTY/GETTY IMAGES ©

The Short List

➡ *Tokyo National Museum* *Perusing the finest collection of Japanese* *art and cultural artefacts in the world.*

- ➡*Yanaka Ginza Stepping back in time along this vintage, mid-20th-century shopping street.*
- ➡*Asakura Museum of Sculpture, Taitō Checking out the home studio of a local artist.*
- ➡*Ueno-kōen Discovering centuries-old shrines and temples in this sprawling park.*
- ➡*Shinsuke Savouring a classic izakaya (Japanese pub-eatery) experience.*

Getting There & Around

🚆 The JR Yamanote line stops at Ueno and Nippori (for Yanaka). Keisei trains from Narita Airport stop at Keisei Ueno Station.

Ⓢ The Ginza and Hibiya lines stop at Ueno. The Chiyoda line stops at Yushima, Nezu and Sendagi – the latter two are convenient for Yanaka.

🚶 Ueno and Yanesen are within reasonable walking distance.

Top Experience

Admire Japanese Art at the Tokyo National Museum

If you visit only one museum in Tokyo, make it this one. Established in 1872, this unprecedented collection of Japanese art covers ancient pottery, Buddhist sculpture, samurai swords, earthy tea ceremony pottery colourful ukiyo-e (woodblock prints), sumptuously embroidered silk kimonos and much, much more.

CONCHI MARTíNEZ/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

東京国立博物館; www.tnm.jp

adult/student ¥620/410, under 18yr & over 70yr free

🕘9.30am-5pm, to 9pm Fri & Sat

S Ginza or Hibiya line to Ueno, exit 7, 🚆 JR Yamanote line to Ueno, Kōen exit

☑

Top Tips

➡Allow two hours to take in the highlights, a half-day to do the Honkan in-depth or most of the day to take in everything.

➡Start with the 2nd floor of the Honkan and be sure to pick up the brochure *Highlights of Japanese Art,* which provides context for the works on display, from room 1-1.

➡Exhibits rotate to protect works and present seasonal displays, so there’s no guarantee that a particular work will be on display.

➡For a couple of weeks in spring and autumn, the back garden, home to five vintage teahouses, opens to the public; at other times there’s a view from the 1st-floor terrace of the Honkan.

Take a Break

There are restau-rants attached to the Gallery of Hōryū-ji Treasures and the Tōyōkan. Head to Ueno-kōen (Ueno Park) for more options.

The Japanese Gallery

The Tokyo National Museum is spread out among several buildings, the most important of which is the 1930s-vintage Honkan (‘Main Building’), which houses the **Japanese Gallery** (and has some art-deco flourishes). Exhibits on the 2nd floor are organised chronologically, starting with antiquities and tracing all the major developments in classical Japanese art up to the colourful *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints) of the early modern era.

Also on display here are the glistening swords, lacquer-plate armour and dramatic helmets that bring to life the samurai – those iconic warriors of Japan’s medieval age (which spans the 12th through 19th centuries; some of the swords on display are old indeed). Exhibits on the 1st floor are organised by craft, such as ceramics or lacquerware, or by theme, such as

Ainu and Ryūkyū folk art or Buddhist sculpture.

Gallery of Hōryū-ji Treasures

The **Gallery of Hōryū-ji Treasures** – another must-see – houses relics from the 7th-century temple Hōryū-ji, one of Japan’s earliest Buddhist temples (and located in Nara prefecture). Particularly spectacular is the spotlit 1st-floor exhibition of 48 gilt Buddha statues, each only 30cm to 40cm tall and all different. The spare, elegant building (1999) was designed by Taniguchi Yoshio (who also did the redesign for NYC’s MoMA).

Gallery of Asian Art

The museum’s **Gallery of Asian Art** (Tōyōkan) features art and antiquities from across the Asian continent, including a diverse collection of Buddhist sculptures – it’s interesting to see how the different deities manifest in different cultural and historical contexts. Also here are gorgeous Chinese and Korean ceramics. The building was designed by Taniguchi Yoshirō, father of Yoshio.

Walking Tour

Yanaka Time Slip

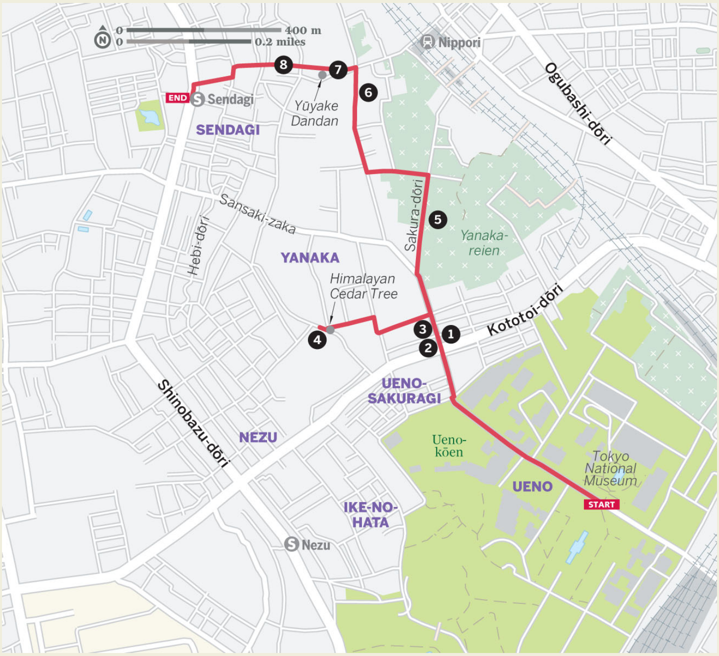
Yanaka is the rare Tokyo neighbourhood that still has a high concentration of old wooden buildings. There are also quiet temples, winding alleys, galleries and ateliers to explore. The neighbourhood is popular with visitors and locals alike, who come to soak up the old-Tokyo atmosphere. Yanaka is near the Tokyo National Museum; visit the museum in the morning, and then follow up with this walk in the afternoon.

Walk Facts

Start Tokyo National Museum

End Yanaka Ginza

Length 3km; two hours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Yanaka-reien
YANAKA
Himalayan Cedar Tree
4
3
1
2
Kototoi-dōri
UENO-SAKURAGI
Shinobazu-dōri
NEZU
Ueno-kōen
Tokyo National Museum
UENO
START
IKE-NO-HATA
Nezu

❶

Shitamachi Museum Annex

First stop: the **Shitamachi Museum Annex** (下町風俗資料館; www.taitocity.net/zaidan/shitamachi), a century-old liquor shop (which operated until 1986) restored to its original state, with old sake barrels, weights, measures and posters. Closed Mondays.

❷

Kayaba Coffee

Vintage **Kayaba Coffee** (カヤバ珈琲; www.instagram.com/kayabacoffee) – in business since the 1930s, and in a building from the 1920s – is a hangout for local students and artists (and increasingly overseas visitors). The egg sandwich, made with sourdough bread from a local bakery, is its speciality.

❸

SCAI

Nearby **SCAI the Bathhouse** (スカイザバスハウス www.scaithebathhouse.com) is a 200-year-old public bathhouse turned contem-porary gallery space (you can still see the old wooden shoe lockers at the entrance). Closed Mondays, Sundays and in between exhibitions.

❹

Enju-ji

Yanaka has many temples but we have a soft spot for **Enju-ji** (延寿寺; http://nichika-do.jp), which honours Nichika-sama – the 'god of strong legs'. It's popular with runners; you can buy an *ema* (votive tablet) to make your own plea to Nichika-sama. Keep in mind that these local temples aren't tourist attractions, so please keep voices down.

❺

Yanaka-reien

Yanaka-reien (谷中霊園; www.tokyo-park.or.jp/reien) is one of Tokyo's most atmospheric and prestigious cemeteries. The last shogun, Yoshinobu Tokugawa, is buried here (you'll see a sign directing you to the right). It's also a favourite sunning spot for stray cats.

❻

Asakura Museum of Sculpture

Exit the cemetery for the Asakura Museum of Sculpture, Taitō – the home studio of an early-20th-century sculptor and now one of Tokyo's best small museums. Closed Mondays and Thursdays.

❼

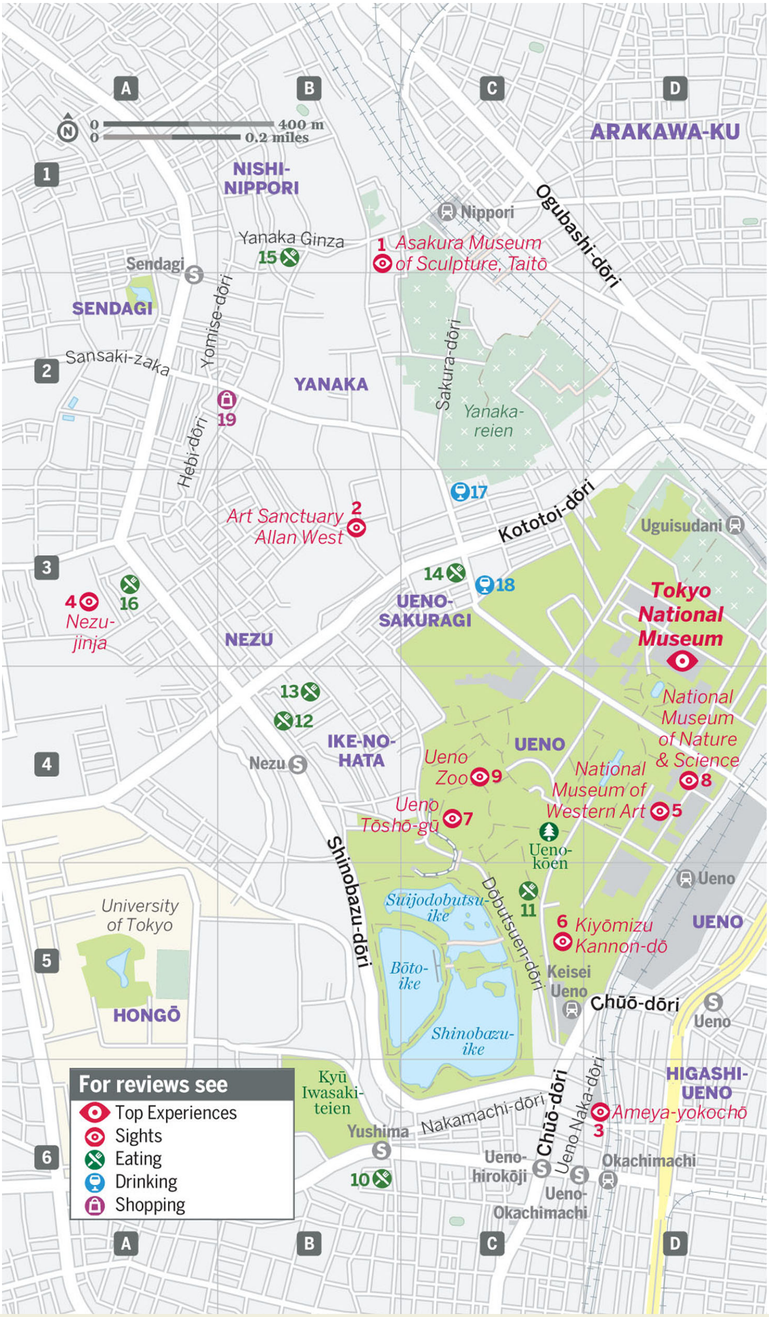
Yanaka Matsunoya

Just before the **Yūyake Dandan** – the romantically named 'Sunset Steps' – is general store **Yanaka Matsunoya** (谷中松野屋; www.yanakamatsunoya.jp), which sells beautifully simple household goods, such as baskets and bamboo strainers. Closed Tuesdays.

❽

Yanaka Ginza

Yanaka Ginza (谷中銀座; www.yanakaginza.com) is pure, vintage mid-20th-century Tokyo, a pedes-trian street lined with fishmongers, vegetable vendors and the like. Most Tokyo neighbourhoods had stretches like this until supermarkets took over. A popular snack is *menchi katsu* (panko-fried minced meat croquettes); several butcher shops sell them.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Sakura-dōri
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YANAKA
19
Yanaka-reien
Hebi-dōri
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Art Sanctuary Allan West 2
Kototoi-dōri
Uguisudani
3
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NEZU
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National Museum of Nature & Science 8
IKE-NO-HATA
UENO
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National Museum of Western Art 5
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Shinobazu-dōri
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Ueno
Suijodobutsu-ike
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University of Tokyo
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6 Kiyōmizu Kannon-dō
UENO
5
Bōto-ike
Keisei Ueno
Chūō-dōri
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HONGŌ
Shinobazu-ike
Kyū Iwasaki-teien
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Okachimachi
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Top Experiences
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Top Experiences

Tokyo National MuseumD3

Sights

1Asakura Museum of Sculpture, TaitōB1

2Art Sanctuary Allan WestB3

3Ameya-yokochōD6

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5National Museum of Western ArtD4

6Kiyōmizu Kannon-dōC5

7Ueno Tōshō-gūC4

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Eating

10ShinsukeB6

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17Yanaka Beer HallC3

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Shopping

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Sights

Asakura Museum of Sculpture, Taitō

MUSEUM

Sculptor Asakura Fumio (artist name Chōso; 1883–1964) built his home studio in the early 20th century and it’s very much representative of the architecture of the time: part Japanese-style, with tatami rooms and an open verandah facing an inner garden (his home) attached to a light-filled concrete space with vaulted ceilings (his studio). Now a museum, there are many of the artist’s signature realist works, mostly of people and cats, on display throughout. Visit the roof terrace for views over the neighbourhood. (朝倉彫塑館; www.taitocity.net/zaidan/asakura)

Asakura Museum of Sculpture, Taitō | ROBERT EVANS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

Art Sanctuary Allan West

ART STUDIO

A centuries-old Buddhist temple facade marks the entrance to the studio and gallery of talented traditional painter and long-time Yanaka resident Allan West. He paints gorgeous screens and scrolls in classical Japanese styles, making his paints from scratch – just as local artists have done for centuries. Visitors are welcome to pop in and watch him at work. Closed irregularly; also open by reservation (☎813-3827-1907). (繪処アラン・ウエスト; www.allanwest.jp)

Ameya-yokochō

MARKET

Ameya-yokochō – nicknamed 'Ame-yoko' by locals – is one of Tokyo's few remaining open-air markets. Here, alongside the elevated JR Yamanote line tracks, vendors sell everything from fresh seafood to discount running shoes. There are also street-food stalls and casual restaurants with street-side tables. It's a lively, spirited place that retains much of the feel of mid-20th-century Tokyo. (アメヤ横町; www.ameyoko.net)

Nezu-jinja

SHINTO SHRINE

Not only is this one of Japan's oldest shrines – established in 1705 – but it is also among the most beautiful, resplendent in vermilion and gold. There is a long corridor of small red *torii* (shrine gates), which make for great photos. The shrine is also famous for its azaleas, which bloom in April. (根津神社; www.nedujinja.or.jp)

National Museum of Western Art

MUSEUM

The permanent collection here runs from medieval Madonna-and-child images to 20th-century abstract expressionism, but is strongest in French impression-ism. For many visitors, however, the building – designed by Le Corbusier and completed in 1959 – is the real reason to visit. It's free to enter the newly restored, light-filled Nineteenth Century Hall, which also houses some Rodin sculptures. (国立西洋美術館; www.nmwa.go.jp)

Kiyōmizu Kannon-dō

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

Kiyōmizu Kannon-dō is one of Tokyo's oldest structures: esta-blished in 1631 and in its present position since 1694, it has survived every disaster that has come its way. It's a miniature of the famous Kiyomizu-dera in Kyoto and is a pilgrimage site for women hoping to conceive (as it enshrines Koso-date Kannon, the protector of childbearing and child-raising). (清水観音堂; http://kiyomizu.kaneiji.jp)

Ueno Tōshō-gū

SHINTO SHRINE

This shrine honours Tokugawa Ieyasu, the warlord who unified Japan in the early 17th century after 150 years of near constant war. It dates from 1651 (though it has had recent touch-ups). The exterior alone is impressive – with its blindingly golden gate – if you want to skip the admission fee. Twice a year, the shrine opens its spectacular peony garden. (上野東照宮; www.uenotoshogu.com)

National Museum of Nature & Science

MUSEUM

While probably a little dated as far as natural history museums go, and with spotty English explanations, we still think the **Japan Gallery** here is worth a visit for anyone interested in the rich and varied wildlife of the Japanese archipel-ago, from the bears of Hokkaidō to the giant beetles of Okinawa. At the time of research, the museum was requiring visitors to purchase timed tickets in advance through the website. (国立科学博物館; www.kahaku.go.jp)

⦿Ueno Zoo

ZOO

Japan's oldest zoo, established in 1882, is home to animals from around the globe, but the biggest attractions are the giant pandas from China: Rī Rī and Shin Shin. Following several disappointments, the two finally had a cub, Xiang Xiang, in 2017 and then twins, Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei, in 2022. At the time of research, panda cub viewing was by lottery only. (**上野動物園**, Ueno Dōbutsu-en; www.tokyo-zoo.net)

Wander Around Ueno-kōen

Ueno-kōen (上野公園; www.ueno-bunka.jp) – Japan's first public park – is a sprawling, open-air cultural complex, with major museums, like the Tokyo National Museum, National Museum of Western Art and National Museum of Nature & Science; Ueno Zoo is here, too.

A main feature of the park of the park is the large pond, **Shinobazu-ike**, much of which is completely covered with giant lotuses that bloom in summer. A causeway leads to a temple, **Benten-dō**, dedicated to Benzaiten, goddess of the waters and patron of the arts. Other shrines and temples on the grounds include Ueno Tōshō-gū, Kiyōmizu Kannon-dō and **Gojōten-jinja** – noteworthy for its photogenic succession of *torii* (gates), which form a vermilion tunnel.

Shaded strolling paths with English signage link the sights. Throughout the year, and especially in summer, festivals and events are held at the park's main plaza, which is also one of the top places in Tokyo to see street performers. There are cafes with outdoor seating, here as well. Meanwhile, there are usually *yatai* (food stalls) on the causeway leading to Benten-dō.

Eating

Shinsuke

IZAKAYA

¥¥

Shinsuke, in business for almost a century, is pretty much the plat-onic ideal of an *izakaya* (Japanese pub-eatery): a long cedar counter, ‘master’ in *happi* (traditional short coat) and *hachimaki* (traditional headband), and smooth-as-silk *daiginjō* (premium-grade sake).

The menu, updated monthly, includes house specialities and seasonal dishes. Reservations recommended; cash only. (シンスケ; www.shinsuketokyo.com)

Inshōtei

JAPANESE

¥¥

In an elegant wooden building from 1875, Inshōtei – which means something like ‘echoes of the pines pavilion’ – has long been a favour-ite spot for almost too-pretty-to-eat *kaiseki*-style meals in Ueno-kōen. There are courses for all budgets; reservations are pretty much essential. Some afternoons it opens up as a tea-house with traditional Japanese sweets. (韻松亭; www.innsyoutei.jp)

Inshōtei | MATT MUNRO/LONELY PLANET ©

Hantei

JAPANESE

¥¥

Housed in a beautiful wooden building from 1909, Hantei is a local landmark. It serves courses of *kushiage* (meat, fish and vege-tables deep-fried in oil like tempura but coated in panko rather than batter) with palate-cleansing raw vegetables and miso dip on the side. The lunch set comes with eight skewers and dinner with 12, though you can order more. (はん亭; www.hantei.co.jp)

Kamachiku

UDON

¥¥

Kama-age udon (wheat noodles served straight in the cook pot) is the speciality at this popular restaurant. It's in a restored brick warehouse from 1910 with a contemporary annex by architect Kengo Kuma. The menu also has tasty side dishes that pair well with sake. (釜竹; www.kamachiku.com)

Nanohana

JAPANESE

¥¥

All the organic ingredients for this small family-run restaurant come from Sado-ga-shima (an island on the Japan Sea) – much of it from the chef's mother's own fields. The excellent-value lunch special is *ochazuke* (rice mixed with cuts of raw fish, other toppings and a clear broth) plus other small, seasonal bites. Dinner is a set course, for which reservations are required. (菜の花; https://ge4w600.gorp.jp/)

Himitsu-dō

SWEETS

¥

Summer in Japan is synonymous with *kakigōri:* shaved ice topped with colourful syrups and sweetened condensed milk. So popular is Himitsu-dō, however, that a queue can form even in the dead of winter. One of the secrets to its success is natural ice harvested from frozen-over waters in Tochigi Prefecture; another is its rotating selection of over 100 flavours. (ひみつ堂; www.instagram.com/himitsudo132; 🥕)

Nezu-no-Taiyaki

SWEETS

¥

This street stall, beloved of locals for half a century, sells just one thing: *tai-yaki* – hot, sweet, bean-jam buns shaped like *tai* (sea bream), a fish considered to be lucky. Come early before they sell out (always by 2pm and sometimes by noon). (根津のたいやき; https://twitter.com/taiyaki_nezu; 🥕)

Drinking

Yanaka Beer Hall

CRAFT BEER

Exploring Yanesen can be thirsty work, so thank heavens for this craft-beer bar with some outdoor seating. It’s part of a charming complex of old wooden buildings (called Ueno Sakuragi Atari) that also houses a bakery-cafe. It has several brews on tap, including a Yanaka lager that’s only available here. Note that it opens early, and also closes pretty early. (谷中ビアホール; www.facebook.com/yanakabeerhall)

Torindō

TEAHOUSE

Sample a cup of paint-thick *matcha* (powdered green tea) at this tiny teahouse on the edge of Ueno-kōen. Tradition dictates that the bitter tea be paired with something sweet, so choose from the artful desserts in the glass counter, then pull up a stool at the communal table. It’s a white building on a corner. (桃林堂)

Shopping

Isetatsu

ARTS & CRAFTS

Dating back to 1864, this venerable stationery shop specialises in *chiyogami* – gorgeous, patterned paper made using woodblocks – as well as papier-mâché figures. (いせ辰; www.isetatsu.com)

Asakusa & Sumida River

Asakusa is a historic neighbourhood, considered representative of 'Shitamachi' – the 'low city' along the Sumida River delta, where the merchants and artisans of the Edo period (1603–1868) lived, worked and embraced a sort of joie de vivre. And there are definitely still traces of this today. Most visitors come for the temple complex Sensō-ji – one of Tokyo's top attractions – but wind up sticking around for that old-Tokyo atmosphere.

Sensō-ji | SEAN PAVONE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

The Short List

➡*Sensō-ji Experiencing one of Japan’s oldest and most famous Buddhist temples – a must see.*

➡*Shitamachi Diving into Asakusa’s side streets to get a sense of the city that once was.*

➡*Wanariya Trying your hand at indigo-dyeing, a traditional Japanese craft.*

➡*Otafuku Eating at one of Asakusa’s historic restaurants, like this oden (hot pot) specialist.*

➡*Fujiya Shopping for artisan-made crafts here and elsewhere in Asakusa.*

Getting There & Around

S The Ginza line stops at Asakusa. The Toei Asakusa line stops at Kuramae and Asakusa (but at a separate station from the Ginza line).

⛴ Water buses, run by two separate companies, connect Asakusa with Ryōgoku, Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien and Odaiba. See for more details.

Top Experience

Get the Japanese Temple Experience at Sensō-ji

Sensō-ji is Tokyo's oldest Buddhist temple, founded in the 7th century. Today it is one of Tokyo's top attractions, drawing visitors from all over Japan and the world (and just a warning: it will be crowded). There's lots to see and do here – from snacking on traditional treats to getting your fortune told – making it the perfect temple experience.

TTSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

浅草寺

☎03-3842-0181

www.senso-ji.jp

admission free

🕒 24hr

S Ginza line to Asakusa, exit 1

☑

Street Food

While Sensō-ji's Nakamise-dōri may look touristy (and it is), there are some noteworthy vendors selling authentic old-school Japanese street food.

Kibidango Azuma Edo-style sweet millet dumplings coated in *kinako* (toasted soy-bean powder) and *matcha*.

Kame-ya Seventy-year-old Kame-ya's speciality is slightly *piri-piri* (spicy) turtle-shaped *sem-bei* (rice crackers) – '*kame'* is Japanese for turtle.

Mangandō Famous for its *imo-kin* (a sweet potato confection wrapped in a thin, crêpe-like dough); while the Nakamise shop is fairly new, Mangandō has been around since 1886.

Kimura-ya *Ningyō-yaki* (red bean paste-filled cakes in cute shapes) are the most popular snack along Nakamise-dōri; Kimuraya is the oldest and most famous purveyor, in business since 1868.

Enter the Precinct at Kaminari-mon

The temple precinct begins at the spectacular Kaminari-mon, which means Thunder Gate. Temples always have more elaborate gates than shrines do – that's one way to tell them apart – but Kaminari-mon is truly of over the top: an enormous red *chōchin* (lantern) hangs from the centre. Guarding the gate on the right is **Fūjin**, the god of wind; on the left, **Raijin**, the god of thunder.

Snack & Stroll Through Nakamise-dōri

Beyond Kaminari-mon is Nakamise-dōri, the temple precinct's commercial strip. Many temples have one: when travel was restricted to religious pilgrimages during the Edo period (1603–1868), destinations like Sensō-ji became super popular, and vendors naturally set up to offer refreshments and souvenirs. It's existed since the early 18th century, and some of the shops are actually pretty old. Shop hours vary, but most open sometime between 9am and 11am and close around dusk.

Pass Through the Inner Gate

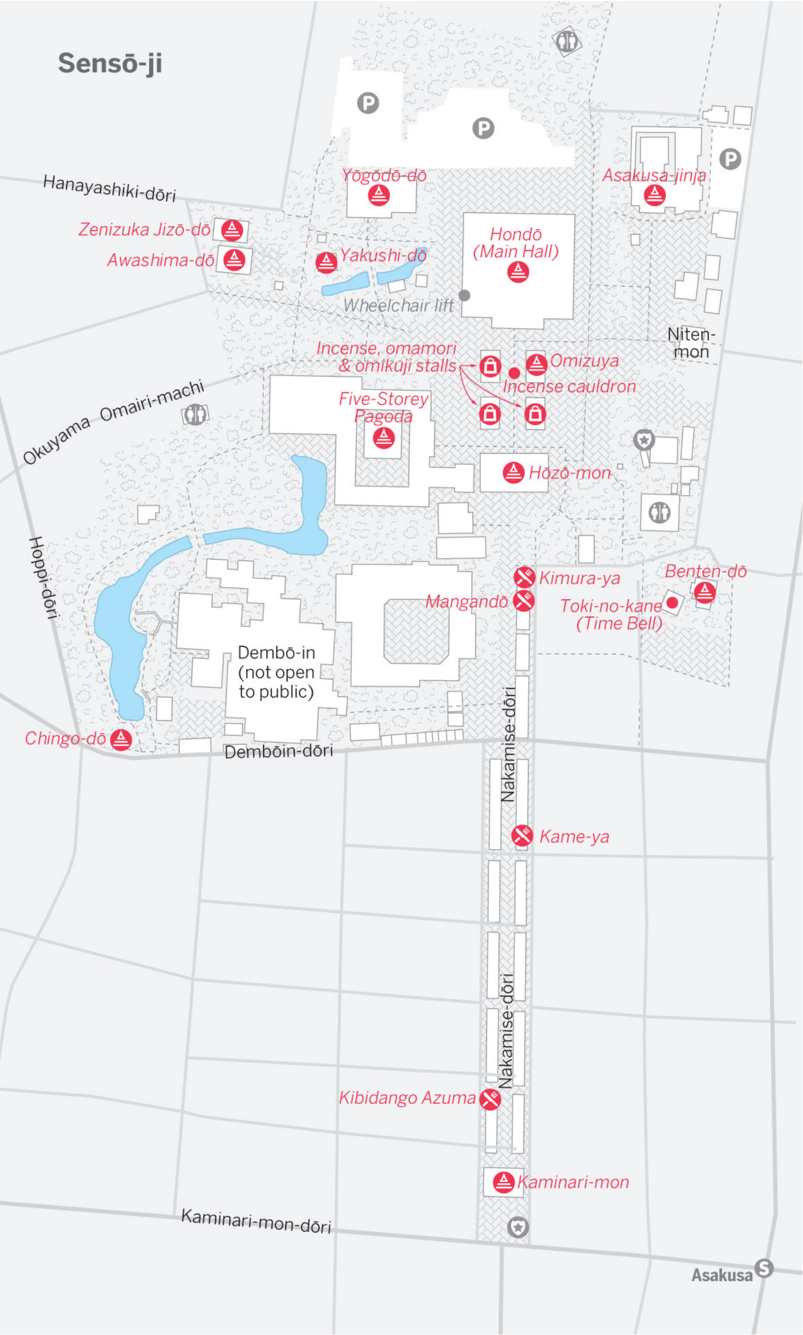
At the end of Nakamise-dōri is the two-storey inner gate, **Hōzō-mon**. It's also known as Nio-mon – Nio are fierce Buddhist guardian deities, and there are two here. On the gate's back side are a pair of 2500kg, 4.5m-tall *waraji* (straw sandals) crafted by some 800 villagers in Yamagata Prefecture; they're meant to symbolise the power of the Nio, and to ward off evil. On your left, look for the temple's **Five-Storey Pagoda**; the second-highest pagoda in Japan, it stands 53m tall.

Visit the Main Hall

The **Hondō**, or Main Hall – also called the Kannon-dō ('Kannon Hall') – is dedicated to Kannon, the Bodhisattva of compassion. Like many Buddhist temples, there's a big earthenware cauldron with smouldering incense in front of the main hall. The smoke is said to bestow health and you'll see people wafting it over their bodies. You can purchase incense at any of the nearby temple kiosks.

The current Hondō, with its dramatic sloping roof, was constructed in 1958, replacing the one destroyed in WWII air raids (all told it's been rebuilt about 20 times in the last 1400 years). The closest you can get inside is the offering box at the top of the stairs; if you wish to pray, simply place your hands together and bow once – there's no need to clap (that's only for shrines).

The Main Hall and its gates are illuminated every day from sunset until 11pm – the minutes just before the sun sinks make for some of the best pictures.


Sensō-ji
Hanayashiki-dōri
Yōgōdō-dō
Asakusa-jinja
Zenizuka Jizō-dō
Awashima-dō
Yakushi-dō
Hondō (Main Hall)
Wheelchair lift
Niten-mon
Incense, omamori & omikuji stalls
Omizuya
Incense cauldron
Okuyama Omairi-machi
Five-Storey Pagoda
Hōzō-mon
Hoppi-dōri
Kimura-ya
Mangandō
Benten-dō
Toki-no-kane (Time Bell)
Dembō-in (not open to public)
Chingo-dō
Dembōin-dōri
Nakamise-dōri
Kame-ya
Nakamise-dōri
Kibidango Azuma
Kaminari-mon
Kaminari-mon-dōri
Asakusa

The Legend of Kannon

According to legend, in 628 CE, two fishermen brothers pulled out a golden image of Kannon (the Bodhisattva of compassion) from the Sumida-gawa and Sensō-ji was built to enshrine it. (The brothers, meanwhile, are honoured at Asakusa-jinja, just next to the shrine precinct.)

Buddhism in Japan is part of the Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) tradition, which teaches that anyone (as opposed to just monks) can attain salvation in this lifetime. A key figure in Mahāyāna Buddhism is the bodhisattva, a compassionate being who, on the cusp of achieving Buddha-hood, delays transcendence in order to help others. Kannon is the most popular deity in Japan, and is believed to have the power to alleviate suffering in this world.

The actual Kannon image (a tiny 6cm) is cloistered away from view deep inside the Main Hall (and admittedly may not exist at all – supposedly even the head priest isn't allowed to see it). But you can see other statues of Kannon at the Tokyo National Museum.

Get Your Fortune Told

Drawing an *omikuji* – a fortune – is a fun temple experience, and fortunately for international visitors Sensō-ji has them in English. Look for kiosks offering them around the main hall.

There are instructions in English, but here's how it works: drop ¥100 into the slot, grab a canister and shake it. Then flip it upside down and pull a stick out – just far enough to note the number (in *kanji* – the characters used for writing Japanese). Look for the matching ideogram on one of the drawers, open it and retrieve a slip of paper from the drawer (the fortune).

Warning: Sensō-ji is famous for negative ones! You can tie it to the rack, and try again if you like.

Walking Tour
Explore Shitamachi

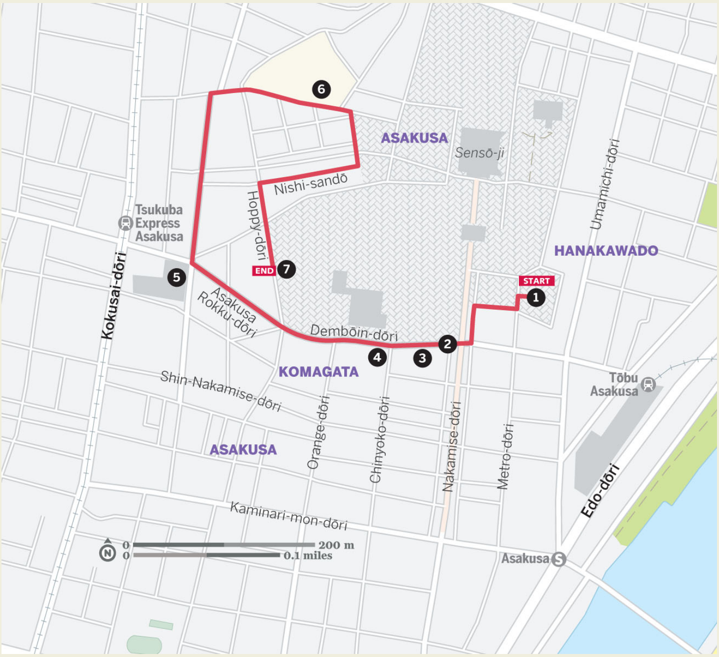
While Sensō-ji is typically thronged, step off the main drags and you'll find far fewer tourists, and the craft shops and small restaurants that have long defined 'Shitamachi' – Tokyo's historic riverside neighbourhoods. What follows are merely suggestions: there are more quiet sub-temples, covered shopping arcades and stores specialising in geta (wooden clogs), among other traditional fashions.

Walk Facts

Start Sensō-ji Benten-dō

End Hoppy-dōri

Length 1.2km; one hour, plus lunch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Sensō-ji
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Hoppy-dōri
Tsukuba Express Asakusa
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❶

Benten-dō

Start with a visit to one of Sensō-ji's quieter sub-temples: **Benten-dō**, which honours the goddess Benzaiten (Sarasvati in Sanskrit), another popular deity in Japan, whose realm covers water and the arts. (The doors only open on 'snake days', according to the old zodiac calendar.) The **bell** here, cast in 1692, has long kept time in Asakusa; it's now struck daily at 6pm by a temple priest.

❷

Demboin-dōri

Exit the temple precinct via **Demboin-dōri**, named for a part of the temple that is off-limits to visitors (among other things, the monks' quarters are here). It looks a bit touristy (though photogenic), with its Edo-revival shopfronts and red street lanterns. But like Nakamise-dori, there are some great old shops here.

❸

Yonoya Kushiho

Yonoya Kushiho dates from the era when professional stylists employed boxwood combs – said to be good for the hair and the scalp – to create the elaborate up-dos that were in vogue at the time. Yonoya, in business since 1717, still makes these functional combs by hand, along with intricately carved decorative ones and hairpins.

❹

Daikokuya

A few doors down is **Daikokuya**, the place to get old-fashioned tempura fried in pure sesame oil – a longtime Asakusa speciality – since 1887. If there's a queue (and there often is), you can try your luck at the annex one block over.

❺

Asakusa Engei Hall

Asakusa was once full of theatres like **Asakusa Engei Hall**, where traditional *rakugo* (comedic monologues) and other forms of comedy were performed. (Fun fact: famous actor and auteur Kitano Takeshi got his start here.) It's hard to follow without Japanese fluency – mostly we just want you to see the facade, with its colourful banners and wooden nameplates listing the acts of the day.

❻

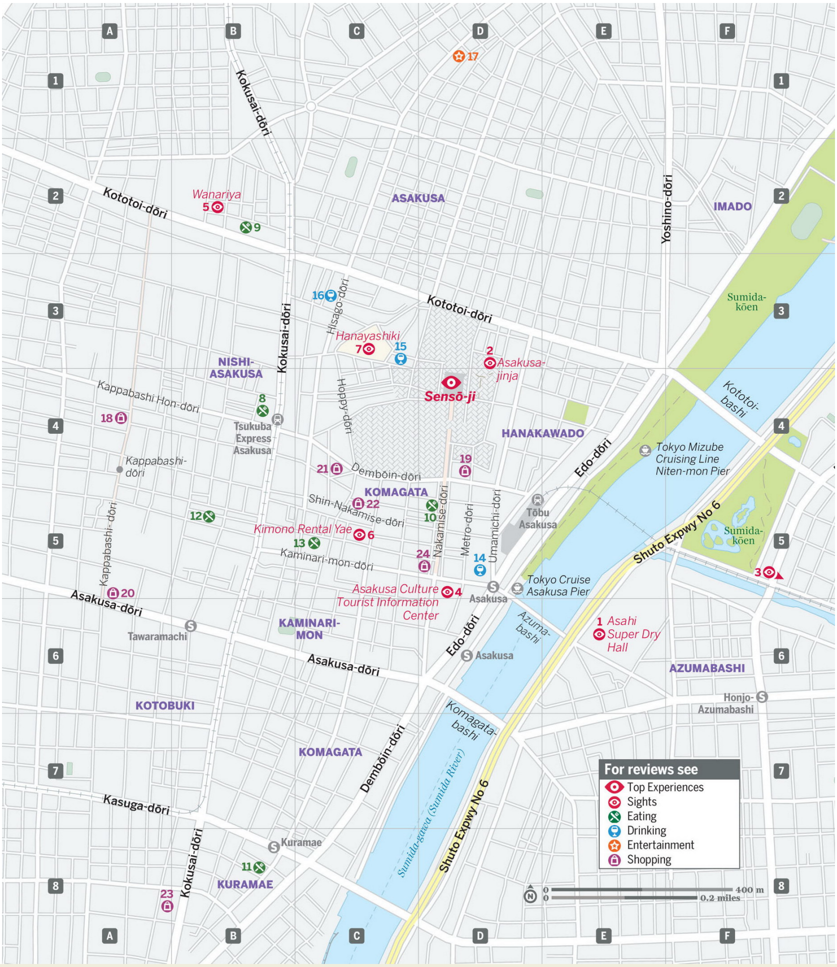
Hanayashiki

Extremely retro Hanayashiki was Japan's first amuse-ment park. Go for the truly haunted house or Japan's old-est roller coaster – or just watch (and listen to the screams) from outside at Sukemasa Coffee.

❼

Hoppy-dōri

Finish your old Asakusa tour with a visit to **Hoppy-dōri** ('hoppy' is a cheap malt beverage). This is one of Asakusa's most atmospheric eating and drinking strips, where casual restaurants (with outdoor seating on stools and plastic tarps for awnings) serve local specialities like *gyū-suji nikomi* (stewed beef tendons). Many shops have picture menus.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Kototoi-dōri
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ASAKUSA
Yoshino-dōri
IMADO
Sumida-kōen
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Hisago-dōri
Kototoi-dōri
Kokusai-dōri
Hanayashiki
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Asakusa-jinja
NISHI-ASAKUSA
Sensō-ji
Kototoi-bashi
Kappabashi Hon-dōri
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Hoppy-dōri
HANAKAWADO
Tsukuba Express Asakusa
Edo-dōri
Tokyo Mizube Cruising Line Niten-mon Pier
Kappabashi-dōri
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Dembōin-dōri
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Top Experiences

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Sights

Asahi Super Dry Hall

ARCHITECTURE

This jet-black, inverted obelisk, part of Asahi Beer’s headquarters, was designed by Philippe Starck and completed in 1989; atop it sits a ‘golden flame’ meant to symbolise Asahi’s passion for brewing. It’s a landmark structure, though one locals are known to refer to as the ‘golden turd’. (フラムドール)

Asakusa-jinja

SHINTO SHRINE

Asakusa-jinja was built in honour of the brothers who discovered the Kannon statue that inspired the construction of Sensō-ji. Deep red in colour, the current building dates from 1649 (repainted in 1996) and is a rare example of early Edo architecture. (浅草神社; www.asakusajinja.jp)

Tokyo Skytree

TOWER

Tokyo Skytree opened in May 2012 as the world’s tallest ‘free-standing tower’ at 634m. Its silvery exterior of steel mesh morphs from a triangle at the base to a circle at 300m. You can see it from all over Asakusa; it’s illuminated nightly, in different patterns, from 6pm to midnight (with maximum brightness between 6pm and 7pm). Inside the tower are two observation decks, at 350m and 450m – the highest in the city. (東京スカイツリー; www.tokyo-skytree.jp)

Sumida River Cruise

Two different operators run water buses down the Sumida River – a great way to combine transport and sightseeing. **Tokyo Cruise** (www.suijobus.co.jp/en) runs from Asakusa to a pier at Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien (35 minutes), and to ports around Tokyo Bay (Odaiba and Toyosu, for example; around 70 minutes). Try to catch one of the three futuristic ships – *Himiko, Hotoluna* and *Emeraldas* – designed by manga and anime artist Leiji Matsumoto, of *Galaxy Express 999* fame. Schedules are seasonal; while bookings are not required they are recommended.

Tokyo Mizube Cruising Line (www.tokyo-park.or.jp/waterbus) also runs water buses from Asakusa (but from the Niten-mon Pier) to Tokyo Bay, conveniently via Ryōgoku (10 minutes) – it's actually the quickest way to get between the two. Unfortunately the schedule is highly seasonal and pretty infrequent. You can also book 90-minute night cruises that take you down the Sumida River to Tokyo Bay and back – it's a cool experience to see the city's illuminated skyline from the bay; reservations required for the night cruises.

Asakusa Culture Tourist Information Center

OBSERVATORY

The biggest draw at this Kengo Kuma–designed information centre (2012) is the roof terrace that offers views over Sensō-ji, Tokyo Sky Tree and the Sumida River. There are also sometimes events and exhibitions here; ask at the ground-floor counter. (浅草文化観光センター; www.city.taito.lg.jp)

Wanariya

ARTS & CRAFTS

Wanariya offers indigo-dying workshops in English, meaning you get a traditional experience and a unique souvenir all in one. Prices and time commitment (from 45 minutes to three hours) depend on what you're dyeing and how. Materials are provided, but you can also bring in your own items to colour. Reservations required (minimum one day in advance). (和なり屋; https://wanariya.co.jp/english)

◉Kimono Rental Yae

CULTURAL

Wander around Asakusa and you'll notice a lot of people dressed up in gorgeous kimono. Rent one yourself at Yae, which provides all the styling and accessories needed to complete the look (for men, women and children). It's popular so book-ings (which can be done online) are recommended, though walk-ins can be accommodated if things are slow. (https://yae-japan.com/en)

◉Hanayashiki

AMUSEMENT PARK

Japan's oldest amusement park has creaky old carnival rides and heaps of vintage charm. You can purchase single ride tickets or a free pass; it's all pretty inexpensive. One highlight is the Japanese-style walk-through haunted house, inspired by a real-life ghost story set on the spot (and rumoured to be haunted in real life). There's also some fun retro arcade games. (花やしき; www.hanayashiki.net/index.html)

Rickshaw Rides

Around the Kaminari-mon entrance to Sensō-ji (as well as elsewhere in Asakusa) you may well get approached by a scantily clad, strapping young man offering you…a ride in his *jinrikisha* (rickshaw). Rides start at ¥4000 for around 10 minutes for two people. **Ebisu-ya** (https://ebisuya.com/en) is one of the more prolific and reliable providers, and their rides provide tour-like commentary; book ahead for an English-speaking driver.

Eating

Asakusa Imahan

JAPANESE

¥¥¥

Prestigious Imahan (in business since 1895) is the most famous of Tokyo's *wagyū* (Japanese beef) restaurants. Order courses of *shabu-shabu,* thin slices of marbled beef cooked in hot broth; or suki-yaki, in which the broth has a deeper soy-sauce flavour and the cooked meat is dipped in raw egg yolk.

Diners on a budget should arrive early for one of the 20 limited serv-ings of a *gyūdon* (sliced beef on rice) and other lunch options under ¥3500. Reservations recommended. (浅草今半; www.asakusaimahan.co.jp)

Otafuku

HOTPOT

¥¥

In business for over a century, Otafuku specialises in *oden,* a classic Japanese dish of vegetables and seafood simmered in a soy sauce and *dashi* (fish stock) broth. You can dine cheaply on radishes and kelp, or splash out on scallops and tuna. Order a couple of items at a time; put your plate onto the counter to signal you want to order more. (大多福; www.otafuku.ne.jp)

Umezono

SWEETS

¥

This traditional sweet shop is one of those totally ordinary-looking Asakusa spots with an incredible pedigree: in business since 1854, its speciality is *awazensai,* a combination of strained red-bean paste and *mochi kibi* (pounded millet) that comes out looking like a golden crescent moon. (梅園; www.asakusa-umezono.co.jp;)

Yuwaeru Honten

JAPANESE

¥¥

Yuwaeru prides itself on its brown rice and other traditional, healthy dishes. Lunch is *teishoku* (set meal), cafeteria-style: grab a tray and follow the directions for your main, sides, soup and rice. In the evening it's small plates (like deep-fried yam) or mains (like salt-grilled seasonal fish) to go with sake, bio wine and craft beer. Reservations recommen-ded for dinner. The small attached shop sells organic kitchen staples. (結わえる本店; www.yuwaeru.co.jp)

Sometarō

OKONOMIYAKI

¥

This historic, vine-covered house is a fun, casual place to try *okonomi-yaki* – savoury pancakes filled with meat, seafood and vegetables that you cook yourself on hotplates set into the tables. It's tatami seating and cash only. If it closes, it's often on a Tuesday or a Wednesday – or during peak summer (the 85-year-old restaurant doesn't have air conditioning). (染太郎)

Misojyu

JAPANESE

¥

When you just want something simple, filling and delicious: choose a soup (say, mushroom miso soup or a chunky pork soup with root vegetables) and an *onigiri* (rice ball; maybe stuffed with grilled salmon or pickled plum) and take a seat inside this stylish, cafe-style spot. Everything's organic. Come before 10am for the breakfast special. (www.misojyu.jp)

Drinking

Kamiya Bar

BAR

Kamiya is one of Tokyo's oldest bars (open since 1880) and still hugely popular – thanks largely to it's cheap 1L *dai-jokki* (大ジョッキ) of Asahi lager for just ¥1120. The more interesting thing to order is the house 'Denki Bran', a century-old secret mix of brandy, gin, wine, curaçao and medicinal herbs. Order from the reception counter. (神谷バー; www.kamiya-bar.com)

KAMIYA BAR
神谷バー
神谷バー

Kamiya Bar | WOLRD DISCOVERY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

Sukemasa Coffee

CAFE

Sukemasa is our current favourite caffeine pit stop in Asakusa: the well-balanced macchiato is served in an earthy ceramic sake cup, the baristas dress in kimono and you have the option to sit outside and watch Hanayashiki's rickety old roller-coaster careen by. The cafe is also known locally for its fruit sandwiches and other sweets. (https://sukemasa.tokyo)

’Cuzn Homeground

BAR

Run by a wild gang of local hippies, ’Cuzn is the kind of bar where anything can happen: a barbecue, a jam session or an all-night karaoke, for example. (カズンホームグラウンド; www.homeground.jpn.com)

Entertainment

Kazunoya Oiwake

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Oiwake is one of Tokyo's few remaining *minyō izakaya:* pubs where traditional folk music is performed. It's a small, cosy place, where the waitstaff and the musicians – who play *shamisen* (a banjo-like instrument), hand drums and bamboo flute – are often one and the same. Sets start at 7pm and 9pm; reservations recommended. (和ノ家追分; www.kazunoya-oiwake.com)

Shopping

Kama-asa

HOMEWARES

A Japanese knife is not only a highly practical and prized piece of kitchenware, but it can also be extremely beautiful. Admire the selection of artisan-made knives at this upmarket store, in business since 1908. There are English- and French-speaking staff on hand to help you choose. The adjacent shop has other kitchen implements, including cast-iron pans, all high quality. (釜浅; www.kama-asa.co.jp)

Fujiya

ARTS & CRAFTS

Fujiya specialises in artisan-made *tenugui:* dyed cloths of thin cotton that can be used as tea towels, handkerchiefs, gift wrapping (the list goes on). They're also just beautiful; some people have them framed. Here they come in both Edo-style traditional patterns and creative modern designs. (ふじ屋; http://tenugui-fujiya.jp)

Dengama

CERAMICS

Dengama sells the real thing: pottery and ceramics from contem-porary artisans working in regions with a long history of the craft. You can pick up earthy pieces from Shigaraki (one of Japan's so-called six ancient kilns) or colourful, ornately decorated porcelain from Kutani (in present-day Ishikawa prefecture). There are items for all budgets. (田窯; www.dengama.jp)

Kappabashi-dōri Shopping

Kappabashi-dōri (合羽橋通り; www.kappabashi.or.jp) is the country's largest wholesale restaurant-supply and kitchenware district – the place to buy bamboo steamer baskets, lacquer trays, neon signs and *chōchin* (paper lanterns). It's also where restaurants get their freakishly realistic plastic food models. While most shops are meant for industry pros, plenty sell items for ordinary shoppers as well. Our two favourites are Kama-asa and Dengama – the latter is right across the street from the ginormous chef's head statue that marks the southern entrance to the district.

Mokuhankan

ART

This intimate shop specialising in traditional Japanese woodblock prints is the work of Tokyo-based print maker Dave Bull. Purchase high-quality replicas of famous works; original prints from contemporary artists; and Bull's and Jed Henry's humorous Ukiyo-e Heroes series – featuring video-game characters reimagined in classical styles. English-speaking staff are on hand to help guide you. (木版館; https://mokuhankan.com)

Yagenbori

SPICES

Yagenbori, a spice dealer since 1625, is often credited with having invented the now ubiquitous *shichimi-togarashi* (seven-flavour chilli pepper). Buy it pre-packaged (in souvenir-worthy canisters) in different spice levels or mix up your own special blend. (やげん堀; https://yagenbori.jp)

Nakamura Tea Life Store

TEA

This is the stylish Tokyo outpost of a long-running organic tea producer in Shizuoka (one of Japan's top tea-growing regions). There are several varieties, including *sencha* (green tea), *hōjicha* (roasted green tea) and *genmaicha* (green tea with roasted brown rice) – packaged in covetable retro tin canisters.

Bunsendō

ARTS & CRAFTS

Bunsendō has been selling hand-painted fans for over 130 years, including the kind that Asakusa's geisha use in their dance perform-ances. They have *sensu* (folding) and *uchiwa* (paddle-shaped kind, popular in summer), as well as other small accessories and incense. (文扇堂; www.asakusa-nakamise.jp/shop-3/bunsendo)

Tokyo Hotarudō

VINTAGE

Step back into the understated elegance of the 1930s at this eccentric, maze-like shop that stocks both Western and Japanese styles – mixing and matching is encouraged – as well as antique lamps and decorative *objets*. It's secreted down an alley; a gramophone marks the way. (東京蛍堂; http://tokyohotarudo.com)

Discover Kuramae

Kuramae is an old warehouse and wholesale district on the banks of the Sumida-gawa that has been refashioned by creatives into an arts-and-crafts district. There are one-of-a-kind boutiques here, plus artisan studios, galleries and cafes. Despite its proximity to Asakusa, Kuramae retains an under-the-radar feel, with few tourists. Some of our favourite spots include Yuwaeru Honten and Nakamura Tea Life Store.

Top Experience

Catch the Big Boys in Action at Ryōgoku Kokugikan

Travellers visiting Tokyo in January, May or September should not miss the opportunity to attend one of the 15-day sumo tournaments at the national stadium, Ryōgoku Kokugikan. Never mind if you're a sports fan or not: ancient sumo is just as captivating for its spectacle and ritual. Tickets go on sale one month before the start of the tournament.

IVAN ROTH/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

両国国技館

☎03-3623-5111

www.sumo.or.jp

1-3-28 Yokoami, Sumida-ku

tickets ¥3800-14,800

S Toei Ōedo line to Ryōgoku, exit A4, 🚆 JR Sōbu line to Ryōgoku, west exit

Tickets

➡Tickets run from ¥3500 (back of the stadium) to ¥20,000 for ringside seats; purchase through the link on the stadium website.

➡At the time of research, same-day tickets sales (the cheapest option) were suspended, though this is likely to return.

Take a Break

The stadium's base-ment banquet hall serves *chanko-nabe* (the protein-rich stew eaten by the wrestlers) for just ¥500 a bowl. Or try **Tomoegata** (www.tomoegata.com), a long-running *chanko-nabe* restaurant named for a former sumo wrestler and stable master, and is still run by the family; it's near JR Ryōgoku Station.

Getting There

🚆 Take the JR Sōbu line to Ryōgoku and use the west exit; the stadium is a two-minute walk.

🚆 The Ōedo line also stops at Ryōgoku.

The Ritual of Sumo

Sumo is a form of wrestling with roots in ancient Shintō harvest rites. While it has obviously evolved, some connections remain: over the packed earth *dōyo* (ring) hangs a roof resembling that of a shrine. Before bouts, which typically last only seconds, the *rikishi* (wrestlers) rinse their mouths with water and toss salt into the ring, both of which are purification rituals.

There is a performative element to the sport, too. Before the actual wrestling starts, the *rikishi* engage in *shikiri* – posturing and glaring at each other to psych the other one out. They also perform the *shiko* movement, where they squat, clap their hands and alternately raise each leg as high as it can go before stamping it down – a show of strength and agility. Radio commentary in English is usually provided (for a small fee), but this was on pause during the time of research.

Rising Through the Ranks

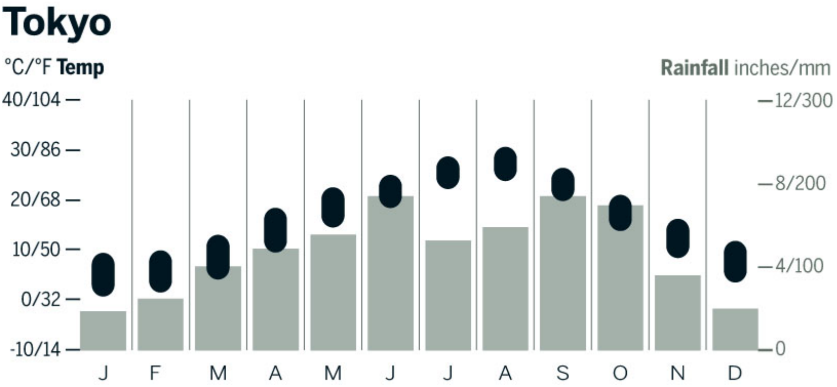
Doors open at 8am, with the first matches, fought by lower-ranking wrestlers. The pag-eantry (and the stakes) begin in earnest in the afternoon, when the *makuuchi* (top-tier) wrestlers perform their ceremonial entrance, followed by that of the *yokozuna* (the top of the top) complete with sword-bearing attendants. (In fact, many spectators skip the morning session, arriving around 2pm or 3pm.)

In order to achieve the highest rank a wrestler must win two consecutive tournaments and be considered, in the eyes of the Sumo Associ-ation, to embody certain traditional values. While sumo is very Japanese in origin, in fact many of the top wrestlers are foreign-born (Mongolia is a sumo powerhouse). The *yokozuna* wrestle in the final, most exciting, bouts of the day. You can see portraits of past champions hanging around the stadium and at the **Sumo Museum** attached to the stadium.

Survival Guide

Before You Go

When to Go



➡**Winter (Dec–Feb)** Cold but clear. Decem-ber is lively with end-of-year celebrations; the city shuts down for the New Year holiday (1–3 January).

➡**Spring (Mar–May)** Gradually warmer days; glorious cherry blossoms from late March to early April.

➡**Summer (Jun–Aug)** Rainy season from June to mid-July, then hot and humid. City gets sleepy during the week-long O-Bon holiday in mid-August.

➡**Autumn (Sep–Nov)** Warm days turn crisp and cool, with the odd typhoon in September and gorgeous autumn leaves in late

November.

Book Your Stay

Tokyo is known for being expensive; how-ever, more attractive budget and midrange options are popping up every year. Levels of cleanliness and service are generally high.

➡Ubiquitous ‘business hotels’ are an economic, if institutional, option.

➡Many budget places are clustered on the east side of town in neighbourhoods like Ueno and Akasaka; increasingly, however, there are great guesthouses all over.

➡For a truly local experience, consider staying in a ryokan (traditional inn with Japanese-style bedding). A night in a capsule hotel is also an experience.

➡Across the board, advance booking is highly recommended. You’ll get a better price at most hotels, and even at hostels walk-ins can fluster staff.

Useful Websites

Jalan (www.jalan.net) Popular local discount accommodation site.

Japanese Inn Group (www.japaneseinngroup.com) Bookings for ryokan and other small, family-run inns.

Lonely Planet (lonelyplanet.com/Japan/Tokyo/hotels) Reviews, recommendations and bookings.

Best Budget

Sawanoya Ryokan (www.sawanoya.com) Family-run inn and long-time traveller favourite in Yanaka.

Nui (https://backpackersjapan.co.jp/nuihostel) Hip hostel in a former warehouse near Asakusa; the ground-floor cafe is a popular local hangout.

9 Hours Suidōbashi (https://ninehours.co.jp/suidobashi) Futuristic capsule hotel in a central location.

Andon Ryokan (www.andon.co.jp) Contem-porary ryokan with small private rooms, styled with antiques and original artwork.

Best Midrange

BnA STUDIO Akihabara (www.bna-akihabara.com) Spacious studio apartments designed by local artists – as much an art installation as a place to sleep.

Hanare (https://hanare.hagiso.jp) Private tatami rooms in a Yanaka guesthouse designed by Tokyo University of the Arts students; includes breakfast and entry to a local bathhouse.

Hotel Niwa Tokyo (www.hotelniwa.jp) Traditional design flourishes at this better-than-ordinary hotel in centrally located Suidōbashi.

Shibuya Excel Hotel Tokyu (www.tokyuhotelsjapan.com/global/shibuya-e/) Spacious and comfortable, but, most importantly, has direct access to Shibuya Station.

Best Top End

Park Hyatt Tokyo (http://tokyo.park.hyatt.com) Palatial high-rise atop a Shinjuku skyscraper with views to die for and a famous bar; also a favourite with visiting celebrities.

Mandarin Oriental (https://www.mandarinoriental.com/en/tokyo/nihonbashi) A cut above the competition thanks to its contemporary Japanese design, including sumptuous bespoke textiles; in Nihombashi.

Imperial Hotel (www.imperialhotel.co.jp) Tokyo’s original luxury hotel is suitably grand (if a little dated), with impeccable service; down the street from the Imperial Palace.

Hilltop Hotel (www.yamanoue-hotel.co.jp) Historic art-deco hotel with serious literary cred – Mishima Yukio wrote his last few novels here; most rooms have antique writing desks.

Arriving in Tokyo

Narita Airport

Most international flights arrive at **Narita Airport** (www.narita-airport.jp), which is 66km east of Tokyo in neighbouring Chiba prefecture (approximately 90 minutes from central Tokyo). It has three terminals, with Terminal 3 handling low-cost carriers. All terminals have tourist information desks.

Haneda Airport

Closer to central Tokyo, **Haneda Airport** (https://tokyo-haneda.com) has two domestic terminals and one international terminal (Terminal 3), which has an information counter. Note that some international flights arrive at awkward early-morning hours, when the only public transport to central Tokyo will be infrequent night buses and taxis.

Tokyo Station

Tokyo Station is the terminus for all shinkansen, the bullet trains that connect Tokyo to major cities all over Japan.

Getting Around

Subway & Train

Tokyo's extensive rail network includes JR (Japan Rail) train lines; private commuter train lines that depart in every direction for the suburbs; and a well-developed subway system.

➡Trains arrive and depart precisely on time and are generally clean and pleasant, but get uncomfortably crowded during rush hours.

➡Stops are announced in English and all stations have English signage.

➡Major transit hubs include Tokyo, Shinagawa, Shibuya, Shinjuku, Ikebukuro and Ueno Stations – all stops on the super useful JR Yamanote (loop) line.

➡Tokyo has 13 subway lines, nine of which are operated by **Tokyo Metro** (www.tokyometro.jp) and four by **Toei** (www.kotsu.metro.tokyo.jp). The lines are colour-coded, making navigation fairly simple.

➡Fares depend on how far you travel, starting from ¥140 and going up to ¥280 (within central Tokyo).

➡Journeys that require transfers between lines run by different operators cost more than journeys that use only one operator's lines (a Suica or Pasmo card makes transferring seamless; otherwise you need to buy separate paper tickets).

Transit Passes

Prepaid, rechargeable Suica and Pasmo cards (they're interchangeable), work on all city trains, subways and buses, and make getting around much easier than dealing with paper tickets.

➡Purchase one from any touch-screen ticket-vending machine (including those at Haneda and Narita Airports); most have an English option.

➡JR stations sell Suica; subway and independent lines sell Pasmo. Both require a ¥500 deposit, which is refunded (along with any remaining charge) when you return the pass to any ticket window.

➡To use the cards, just tap them over the card readers at the ticket gates upon entering and exiting. If you somehow manage to invalidate your card, take it to the station window and staff will sort it out.

➡Passes can be topped up at any touch-screen ticket-vending machine (not just, for example, at JR stations for Suica cards).

➡Fares for pass users are slightly lower (a few yen per journey) than for paper-ticket holders, but the real value is in the convenience: you can also use them to pay at most vending machines, convenience stores and taxis.

Tickets

➡You can still buy single-ride paper tickets at touch-screen ticket-vending machines outside station ticket gates, though using a Suica or Pasmo is much more convenient.

➡To purchase the correct ticket, you'll need to work out the fare from the chart above the machines. If you're unsure, just buy a ticket for the cheapest fare (you can sort it out when you exit at the 'fare adjustment' machine).

➡Insert your ticket in the slot at the gate (only some of the ticket gates will have slots for paper tickets). Pick it up when it pops out again, as you'll need it to exit the station.

Navigating Tokyo

Tokyo is difficult to navigate, even for locals. Only the biggest streets have official names, and they don't figure into addresses; instead, addresses are derived from districts, blocks and building numbers. Smartphones with navigation apps have been a real boon for travellers – probably the biggest reason to want a stable, consistent wi-fi connection at all times.

Large stations, with multiple exists, can be another headache. Try to get your bearings and decide where to exit while still on the platform: look for the yellow signs that indicate which stairs lead to which exits. If you're unsure which exit to take, look for area maps, usually posted near the ticket gates, that show the locations of the exits.

Taxi

Taxis only make economic sense for short distances or groups of four (or after the trains stop running).

➡Fares start at ¥420 for the first 1km, then rise by ¥80 for every 233m you travel or for every 90 seconds spent in traffic.

➡There's a surcharge of 20% between 10pm and 5am.

➡Drivers rarely speak English, though fortu-nately most taxis have navigation systems. It's a good idea to have your destination written down in Japanese, or better yet, a business card with an address.

➡Taxis take credit cards and IC passes in addition to cash.

➡Taxis are generally easy to hail from the street; a red light means the taxi is available.

➡You can also use Uber to summon a taxi (Tokyo strictly regulates ride-sharing apps, so only licensed taxi drivers appear on the app).

Bicycle

Tokyo is not a bicycle-friendly city: cycling lanes are rare and ticketing (or worse, impounding) for footpath parking is common. Despite this you'll see locals on bikes everywhere.

➡Some accommo-dation offer bikes to lend, sometimes for free or for a small fee.

➡Tokyo also has a few bike sharing schemes, though the sign-up process can be confusing.

➡**Docomo Cycle** (https://docomo-cycle.jp) has the broadest coverage, port-wise; a one-day pass for an electric-assist bicycle (the only option) costs about ¥1650.

Boat

Two operators – **Tokyo Cruise** (http://suijobus.co.jp) and **Tokyo Mizube Cruising Line** (www.tokyo-park.or.jp/waterbus) – run water buses up and down the Sumida-gawa (Sumida River). See for more information.

➡There are piers in Asakusa, Hama-rikyū Onshi-teien and points around Tokyo Bay.

➡Tickets can be purchased subject to availability before departure at any pier (or in advance online).

➡Schedules are seasonal (and infrequent in winter), so check ahead.

Bus

Toei (www.kotsu.metro.tokyo.jp/eng/services/bus.html) runs an extensive bus network, though it's rarely more convenient than the subway.

Essential Information

Accessible Travel

Tokyo is making steps to improve universal access – or *bariafurī* (barrier-free) in Japanese. It is a slow process, though one that got a boost from the lead-up to the 2020 Olympics.

Accessible Japan (www.accessible-japan.com) is the best resource; it also produces an ebook with lots of detail.

Download Lonely Planet's free *Accessible Travel* guide from http://lptravel.to/AccessibleTravel.

Business Hours

Note that some outdoor attractions (such as gardens) may close earlier in the winter. Standard opening hours:

Banks 9am to 3pm (some to 5pm) Monday to Friday

Bars 6pm to late, with no fixed closing hours

Boutiques noon to 8pm, irregularly closed

Cafes vary enormously; chains 7am to 10pm

Department stores 10am to 8pm

Museums 9am or 10am to 5pm; often closed Monday

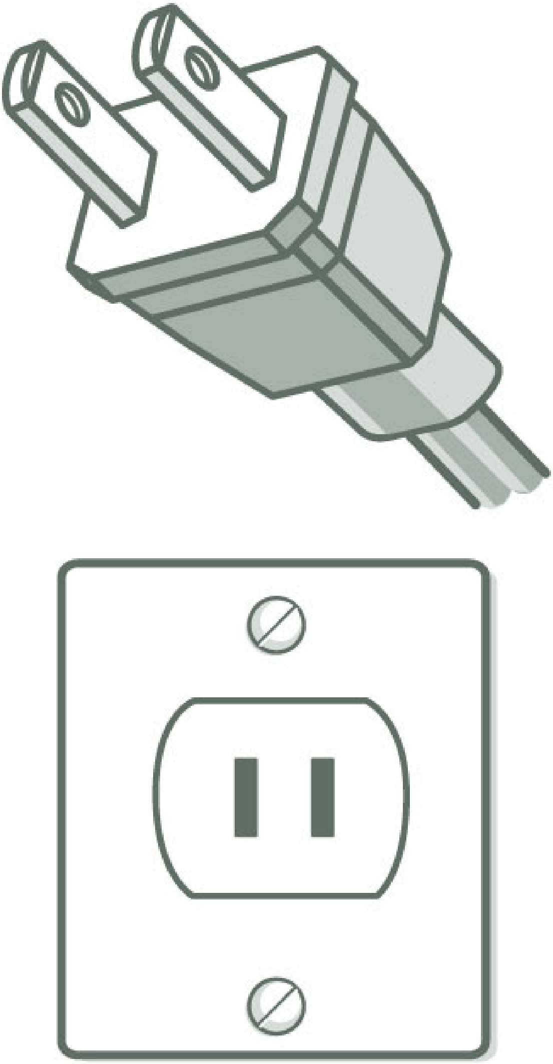
Post offices 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday

Restaurants lunch 11.30am to 2pm, dinner 6pm to 10pm; last orders taken about half an hour before closing

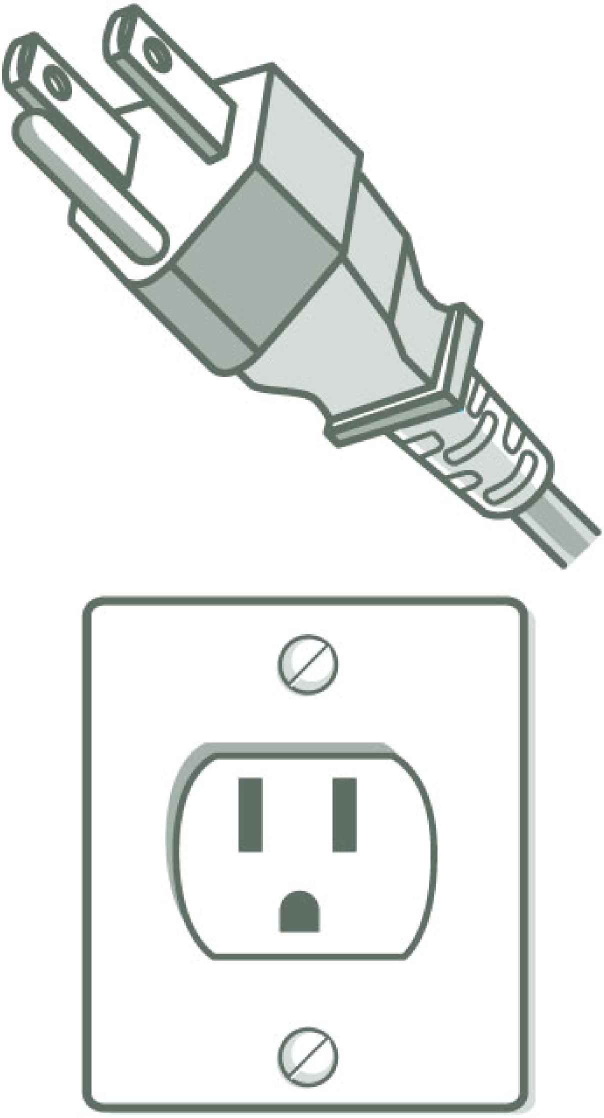
Discount Cards

Grutto Pass (¥2500; www.rekibun.or.jp/grutto) Free or discounted admission to over 100 Tokyo attractions (mostly museums and gardens). If you hit a few pricey museums the pass is a good deal; purchase online.

Electricity



Type A
120V/60Hz



Type B
120V/60Hz

Emergencies

Ambulance & Fire☎119

Police☎110

Police Consultation Hotline☎03-3501-0110;🕒 24 hours

Police Consultation Hotline for Foreign Residents
☎03-3503-8484;🕒 weekdays 8:30am–5:15pm

Tokyo Medical Info Hotline☎03-5285-8181;🕒 9am–8pm

Internet

➡With some excep-tions, decent wi-fi is standard in Tokyo accommodation).

➡The city has an increasing number of free hot spots, which can be found on subway platforms, on the streets of some districts and at many convenience stores, major attractions and shopping centres. Unfortunately these connections are often weak and spotty.

➡Some travellers manage with the free hot spots, but most prefer to have a pocket wi-fi device or a data SIM, especially for navigation apps.

Money

ATMs

➡Most Japanese bank ATMs do not accept foreign-issued cards. Even if they display Visa and MasterCard logos, most accept only Japan-issued versions.

➡Seven Bank ATMs at 7-Eleven convenience stores and Japan Post Bank ATMs at post offices accept most overseas cards and have instructions in English. Seven Bank ATMs are accessible 24/7.

➡Other convenience store ATMs usually accept international cards as well (Seven Bank is just the most ubiquitous and reliable).

➡There is a withdrawal limit of ¥100,000 per transaction at Seven Bank ATMs (and ¥50,000 at Japan Post Bank ATMs). Bear in mind that your bank or card company may impose an even stricter limit; if your card is rejected, this might be the reason why.

Credit Cards

Most businesses in Tokyo now accept credit cards, usually displaying the logo for the cards they accept on the cash register. If in doubt, ask up front.

➡Visa is the most widely accepted, followed by MasterCard, American Express and Diners Club. Foreign-issued cards should work fine.

➡The standard in Japan is a chip card that requires a PIN for verification.

➡Since the pandemic, a greater number of places only accept credit cards or other forms of cashless payment (such as a Pasmo or Suica).

Money-Saving Tips

➡Many of Tokyo's more expensive restaurants are comparatively reasonable at lunch; you'll get better value if you splurge at midday.

➡After 5pm, grocery stores, bakeries and department store food halls slash prices on *bentō* (boxed meals), baked goods and sushi.

➡Subway stations are close in the city centre; save cash by walking if you only need to go one stop.

➡Check out **Tokyo Cheapo** (http://tokyocheapo.com) for other money-saving tips.

Public Holidays

If a national holiday falls on a Monday, most museums and restaurants that normally close on Mondays will remain open and close the next day instead.

New Year's Day (Ganjitsu) 1 January

Coming-of-Age Day (Seijin-no-hi) Second Monday in January

National Foundation Day (Kenkoku Kinen-bi) 11 February

Emperor's Birthday (Tennō-no-Tanjōbi) 23 February

Spring Equinox (Shumbun-no-hi) 20 or 21 March

Shōwa Day (Shōwa-no-hi) 29 April

Constitution Day (Kempō Kinem-bi) 3 May

Green Day (Midori-no-hi) 4 May

Children's Day (Kodomo-no-hi) 5 May

Marine Day (Umi-no-hi) Third Monday in July

Mountain Day (Yama-no-hi) 11 August

Respect-for-the-Aged Day (Keirō-no-hi) Third Monday in September

Autumn Equinox (Shūbun-no-hi) 23 or 24 September

Health & Sports Day (Taiiku-no-hi) Second Monday in October

Culture Day (Bunka-no-hi) 3 November

Labour Thanksgiving Day (Kinrō Kansha-no-hi) 23 November

Safe Travel

The biggest threat to travellers in Tokyo is the city's general aura of safety; keep up the same level of caution and common sense that you would back home.

➡Drink spiking continues to be a problem in Roppongi (which can result in robbery, extortion and, in extreme cases, physical assault). This is most often the case when touts are involved; never follow a tout into a bar, anywhere.

➡Men are likely to be solicited in Roppongi and neighbourhoods that are considered red-light districts, including Kabukichō (in Shinjuku) and Dōgenzaka (in Shibuya). Women – particularly solo women – are likely to be harassed in these districts.

➡Groping does some-times occur on crowded trains. Most Tokyo train lines have women-only carriages at peak times. These are marked with signs (usually pink) in Japanese and English. Children can ride in them, too.

➡COVID-19 cases and casualties in Tokyo were initially low compared to many cities abroad; however, Japan was experiencing as many as 200,000 new cases a day in late 2022. Travellers are advised to check the latest information before making travel plans; current border restrictions and quarantine protocols are posted on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (www.mofa.go.jp).

Telephone

Country code☎81

Tokyo area code☎03

International access code☎001

Mobile Phones

➡Japan is phasing out its 3G network in favour of 4G and 5G, so phones compatible with the latter two should work in Tokyo.

➡Prepaid data-only SIM cards for unlocked smartphones are widely available and can be purchased at kiosks in the arrival halls at both Narita and Haneda airports, and also from dedicated desks at major electronics retailers like Bic Camera and Yodobashi Camera.

➡Getting the SIM to work may require some fiddling with settings, so make sure you’ve got a connection before you leave the counter. Staff usually speak some English.

➡Currently only **Mobal** (www.mobal.com) offers SIMs that give you an actual phone number from which to make and receive calls; it offers English-language support and can ship to your accommodation.

➡Otherwise, the variety is huge, and which one to go with depends on the length of your stay and how much data you need.

Public Phones

Public phones, most commonly located around train stations, do still exist – mostly for emergencies. Ordinary public phones are green; those that allow you to call abroad are grey and are usually marked ‘International & Domestic Card/Coin Phone’.

➡Local calls cost ¥10 per minute; note that you won’t get change on a ¥100 coin.

➡The minimum charge for international calls is ¥100, which buys you a fraction of a minute. Dial 001 010 (KDDI), 0061 010 (SoftBank Telecom) or 0033 010 (NTT), followed by the country code, area code and local number. There’s very little difference in the rates from the different providers; all offer better rates at night.

➡Reverse-charge (collect) international calls can be made by dialling 0051.

Toilets

Tokyo has few actual public toilets; most people prefer the privately maintained ones provided by train stations, tourist attractions, depart-ment stores and malls, which tend to be nicer.

➡Toilets are typically marked with generic gendered pictograms; but just in case, note the characters for female (女) and male (男).

➡Newer or recently redeveloped buildings may have ‘multi-functional’ (多機能; *takinō*) restrooms; these large, separate rooms are wheelchair accessible, may have nappy changing or ostomate facilities, and are gender-neutral.

➡Toilet paper is usually present, but it’s still a good idea to have a packet of tissues on hand. Paper towels and hand dryers may or may not be present; most Japanese carry a handkerchief for use after washing their hands.

➡Separate toilet slippers will be provided in establishments where you take off your shoes at the entrance; they are typically just inside the toilet door.

Dos & Don’ts

➡Relax. Japan is known for its hair-splitting etiquette, but foreign tourists are given a pass for just about everything.

➡Pack light. Tokyo hotel rooms are small, with little room for luggage.

➡Dress smartly if you want to blend in, although for all but the fanciest restaurants, casual clothes are fine.

➡Wear shoes you can slip on and off easily, as many ryokan and restaurants still ask you to leave your shoes at the door.

➡Short or tight clothing can be tricky if you find yourself having to sit on the floor.

➡Neither shoes nor slippers should ever be worn on tatami mats.

➡Eating on the subway or while walking down the street is considered impolite.

➡Get in line: the Japanese are famous queuers – and stand to the left on escalators!

Tourist Information

Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building Tourist Information Center (https://tokyotouristinfo.com) Tokyo’s main TIC, with English-speaking staff and lots of information and publications. There are additional branches at Keisei Ueno Station, Haneda Airport and Shinjuku Bus Terminal, plus smaller ones throughout the city.

JNTO Tourist Information Center (; www.jnto.go.jp) Run by the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO), this TIC has information on Tokyo and beyond. Staff speak English.

JR East Travel Service Center (JR 東日本トラベルサービスセンター; ; www.jreast.co.jp) Tourist information, rail passes, same-day baggage storage, porter services and bookings for ski and onsen getaways. Staff speak English. There are also branches at all Narita and Haneda airport terminals.

Visas

Citizens of 68 regions/countries are auto-matically issued a temporary visitor visa, good for 90 days, on arrival. Before making travel plans, be sure to check the current situation on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (www.mofa.go.jp).

Double tap to enlarge

Language

Japanese pronunciation is easy for English speakers, as most of its sounds are also found in English. Note, though, that it's important to make the distinction between short and long vowels, as vowel length can change the meaning of a word. The long vowels (**ā**, **ē**, **ī**, **ō**, **ū**) should be held twice as long as the short ones. All syllables in a word are pronounced fairly evenly in Japanese. If you read our pronunciation guides as if they were English, you'll be understood.

To enhance your trip with a phrasebook, visit **lonelyplanet.com**.

Basics

Hello.	こんにちは。	*ko·n·ni·chi·wa*
Goodbye.	さようなら。	*sa·yō·na·ra*
Yes.	はい。	*ha·i*
No.	いいえ。	*ī·e*
Please.	ください。	*ku·da·sa·i*
Thank you.	ありがとう。	*a·ri·ga·tō*
Excuse me.	すみません。	*su·mi·ma·sen*
Sorry.	ごめんなさい。	*go·men·na·sa·i*
What's your name?	お名前は何ですか?	*o na·mae wa nan de·su ka*
My name is ...	私の名前は…です。	*wa·ta·shi no na·mae wa…de·su*
Do you speak English?	英語が話せますか?	*ei·go ga hana·se·ma·su ka*
I don't understand.	わかりません。	*wa·ka·ri·ma·se·n*

Eating & Drinking

I'd like to reserve a table for (two).	(2人)の予約をお願いします。	*(fu·ta·ri) no yo·ya·ku wo o·ne·ga·i shi·ma·su*
I'd like (the menu).	(メニュー)をお願いします。	*(me·nyū) wo o·ne·ga·i shi·ma·su*
I don't eat (red meat).	(赤身の肉)は食べません。	*(aka·mi no niku) wa tabe·ma·se·n*
That was delicious!	おいしかった。	*o·i·shi·ka·tta*
Please bring the bill.	お勘定をください。	*o·kan·jō wo ku·da·sa·i*

Cheers!	乾杯!	*kan·pai*
beer	ビール	*bī·ru*
coffee	コーヒー	*kō·hī*

Shopping

I'd like ...	…をください。	*...wo ku·da·sa·i*
I'm just looking.	見ているだけです。	*mi·te i·ru da·ke de·su*

How much is it?
いくらですか? *i·ku·ra de·su ka*

That's too expensive.
高すぎます。 *taka·su·gi·ma·su*

Can you give me a discount?
ディスカウントできますか? *di·su·ka·u·n·to de·ki·ma·su ka*

Emergencies

Help!
たすけて! *ta·su·ke·te*

Go away!
離れろ! *ha·na·re·ro*

Call the police!
警察を呼んで! *kē·sa·tsu wo yon·de*

Call a doctor!
医者を呼んで! *i·sha wo yon·de*

I'm lost.
迷いました。 *ma·yo·i·ma·shi·ta*

I'm ill.
私は病気です。 *wa·ta·shi wa byō·ki de·su*

Where are the toilets?
トイレはどこですか? *to·i·re wa do·ko de·su ka*

Time & Numbers

What time is it?
何時ですか? *nan·ji de·su ka*

It's (10) o'clock.
(10)時です。 *(jū)·ji de·su*

Half past (10).
(10)時半です。 *(jū)·ji han de·su*

morning	朝	*a·sa*
afternoon	午後	*go·go*
evening	夕方	*yū·ga·ta*
yesterday	きのう	*ki·nō*
today	今日	*kyō*
tomorrow	明日	*a·shi·ta*

1	一	*i·chi*
2	二	*ni*
3	三	*san*
4	四	*shi/yon*
5	五	*go*
6	六	*ro·ku*
7	七	*shi·chi/na·na*
8	八	*ha·chi*
9	九	*ku/kyū*
10	十	*jū*

Transport & Directions

Where's the ...?
…はどこですか? *...wa do·ko de·su ka*

What's the address?
住所は何ですか? *jū·sho wa nan de·su ka*

Can you show me (on the map)?
(地図で)教えてくれませんか? *(chi·zu de) o·shi·e·te ku·re·ma·se·n ka*

When's the next (bus)?
次の(バス)は何時ですか? *tsu·gi no (ba·su) wa nan·ji de·su ka*

Does it stop at ...?
…に停まりますか? *...ni to·ma·ri·ma·su ka*

Please tell me when we get to ...
…に着いたら教えてください。 *...ni tsu·i·ta·ra o·shi·e·te ku·da·sa·i*

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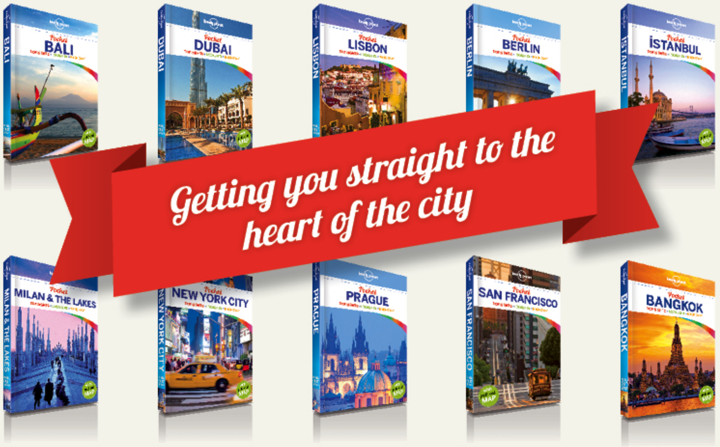
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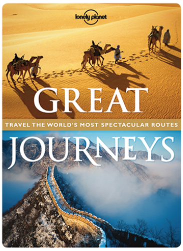
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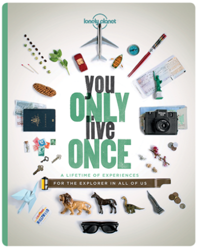
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